

Postmodern Childhood

Memories of My Youth From the Late 20th Century

By Stephen Watson

Copyright © 2023 Human Primate Press
All rights reserved.
ISBN: 9798390354421

Forward

Writing this book about my childhood was a real emotional roller coaster ride. It's hard to put yourself under a microscope and revisit old memories that are probably better off left

alone or tucked away in the back of my mind. I started the task of writing this book about my childhood thinking it would be fun to see what I could remember but it brought back other memories that weren't so good like living in poverty to remembering my own shyness at school, or how poorly I did in school, and getting bullied. Much of my childhood was spent during the 1980s. That's the decade I remember most as a child. I grew up in the postmodern era, the generation that is considered Generation-X, while my Dad was a product of the modern age, like a product of the World's Fair thinking of flying saucers and space colonies. If you were like me from Generation-X I'm sure there are a lot of similarities to what you will read, our youth that was known for its reckless freedom. Our parents would let us go outside and play and do what we wanted and I'm certain that wasn't only unique to my experience. We were all a part of the current events from that time too, like the changing trends, emerging technology like personal computers, video games, pop music, cable TV, going to public schools, living in suburbia with cookie cutter houses sharing similar experiences. This book covers many topics and challenges a family faces that are still relevant in today's society like Grandparents stepping in to raise children; Autism; having a learning disability; hunger; poverty; moving to a new place and learning a new language;

emergencies like automobile accidents or fires; divorce; childhood friends; childhood crushes; financial struggles; the free lunch program etc. etc. This book was a test of my memory since my childhood was so long ago. It's a type of documentation or time capsule capturing those moments in my life showing how people lived during the late 20th Century through the eyes of a person who lived it. This isn't to say my memories are 100% accurate but what you read is what I remember. Everything you read here is raw and uncensored, it's not filtered and may be offensive at times but I think it's important to depict life as it happened. Then there are things that may seem bizarre, from my Dad's hobbies like trying to build a flying saucer, to strange dreams I had or strange things I saw. Some may find my retelling of life events refreshing where readers don't want another sob story, excuses, or blame like so many books written by famous celebrities or public figures using ghost writers. This is not a PR stunt to appear on talk shows but just one person writing a book and putting his memories down on paper. Maybe some can take lessons or inspiration from reading about my childhood like my big sister described in this book who strove to achieve. After writing this book when I reflect back, of course there are regrets, I could have done this, I could have done and when you're young some things are out of your control but

the more innocent times like having neighborhood playmates were probably the best memories of my youth. Let's start off with my earliest childhood memories that are kind of vague because I was so young.

Memories Of Early American Childhood

I was born at Parkland Hospital in Dallas, Texas, the same hospital JFK was rushed off to after his assassination. My dad would use the emergency room during childbirth because it was considered free health care. A Star Trek convention was happening nearby and my dad tells the story of sharing a cigar with some of the cast members of the original Star Trek TV series to celebrate my birth. I believe it was William Shatner and Sulu or actor George Takei who shared a cigar with him. Some have memories of their childhood even as young as a baby but that's not the case with me. My earliest memories are a bit vague. My Mom tells the story of how after I was born I was a big baby and other women thought I was adorable but did not want to hold me because of my weight. I don't consider myself to be obese but I've been called a "big guy" on many occasions and always had a healthy appetite. I have a memory of being shy and hiding behind my Mother's leg at church still sucking my thumb and twirling my hair. We were at a church where my Grandparents lived in

Comanche, Texas. Another woman thought I was cute because I had dimples and she was trying to talk to me. I also had a cowlick on top of my head as a young child. Some of the earliest memories were walking to elementary school with my big sister. I remember our family lived in Grand Prairie, Texas that was a suburb between Dallas and Fort Worth. All of my youth was spent in the suburbs with exception of a short stint living in Italy which I will describe later. I have vague recollections of the elementary school in Grand Prairie, Texas. I do remember not wanting to go to school even at that young age but I suppose the anxiety of not wanting to go to school is not unusual. I see it myself today with kids kicking and screaming with their parents carting them off to school. I remember walking home from school and I told my sister a girl named Angie liked me and my sister teased me about it saying, "Angie and Stephen sitting in a tree K I S S I N G..." There is one memory of attending a birthday party for a fellow classmate that took place at a McDonalds. My mom wrapped the student's present by recycling a box, maybe a box of cookies or vanilla wafers, I forget what the product on the box was, pretty sure it was vanilla wafers, but when the student opened the wrapping he thought I gave him a box of cookies only to find a toy car inside. They all laughed like it was a pleasant surprise. I suppose that sort of thing

impresses kindergarten kids or first graders. I forget how old I was but it was old enough to start attending public school. McDonalds also brings back other young childhood memories. The image of Ronald McDonald or Hamburglar, the playground outside of McDonalds for kids to play on. Adults don't think much of a fast food chain, only an affordable meal but it's those small things like toys with a happy meal or inside a Cracker Jack box that make an impression on a child. Another memory while living in Grand Prairie, Texas is one of my earliest friends. I think his name was Bart. We would play together in his front yard. Bart was bigger than me and I remember him playing with a toy truck pushing it in the dirt. I have a memory of my big sister throwing a block of wood at my head in the back yard and I still have the scar. She also fell on something metal and had to have stitches under her eye. I remember my dad driving fast through red lights to the emergency room and he gave us a Three Musketeers candy bar out of the vending machine while she was being tended to. I remember the toys of my young childhood. I had a NASA Saturn 5 rocket that could detach in stages like the real rocket that went to the moon. I remember having nightmares of Captain America chasing me on his motorcycle while he was holding a shield like depicted on TV. My parents were driving a station wagon car and I could see

Captain America from out the back window catching up with us on his motorcycle while I was overcome with fear. Another early memory is being taken to a Fourth of July fireworks display and the loud booms making me cry with fright. I also remember my dad taking me to see science fiction movies from that time like The Black Hole, Star Wars, Condor Man. I remember not liking suspenseful moments at the movies and looking down, also not being able to watch mushy romantic scenes. I remember covering my ears with my hands and wincing when dropping something or when an accident would happen only to realize it wasn't that serious. I have a memory of being at a hotel or apartment with my Mother and Father and sisters and getting my head stuck between the fence rail that was on the patio walkway as we were leaving. I thought it would be funny to stick my head through the bars of the fence where there were gaps and realized I couldn't pull my head out. I was overcome by total panic yelling and crying and my sister told my Dad my head was stuck while laughing and he told me to calm down turning my head so I could pull it out. I remember going to the hospital and getting my childhood vaccines like the polio vaccine and one vaccine administered to my mouth that tasted bad. I remember my sister's also had to get their vaccines. I have a memory of my Mom making squash spaghetti using a

kitchen appliance that could turn a vegetable like squash into strands of noodles and throwing up after eating it. This gave me a sort of phobia over squash throughout much of my childhood. I have a memory of getting a red rash from wearing wool like I was allergic to wool. I remember my Grandfather's English bulldog taking a bite out of the back of my pants as I ran to swing on a rope that was hanging from the ceiling on his porch. My grandfather put the rope there for the bulldog. I remember walking up to a horse that was standing behind a fence, then it made a horse nicker where snot blew out of its nostrils and got all over my face and that made me grossed out, I think I may have started crying afterward. My sister used to laugh at a family portrait of me as a child grabbing my crotch with my hand, not as an offensive gesture but because I liked the feel of it.

Moving to Northern Italy

My Dad was adopted from Italy to America during the early 1950s and later on in life while we were still young kids he wanted to go back and visit his biological sister in Italy that he re-connected with from writing letters. He tells the traumatic story of being orphaned and separated from his sister in Southern Italy where he was eventually taken to an orphanage in Rome and from there

adopted to America arriving by plane. After being adopted to America his adopted mother named Peggy would divorce and move to Sherman, Texas from Boston, Massachusetts where she would eventually remarry a red headed car salesman named Bill Watson right before my dad graduated from high school. My dad tells the story of a girl he liked in school that was interested in him but after learning his name was changed to Watson she lost interest and he jokes that he has three last names - his biological Italian last name and the two last names after being adopted to America. I'm often asked about my last name Watson or someone brings up Sherlock Holmes hearing the name and I explain that my dad was adopted and retained the name Watson but I'm really a product of America's melting pot unlike others who come from immigrant families and identify with a specific race, ethnicity, or culture. I don't really identify with Italian culture for the simple fact I wasn't around other Italian Americans like on the East Coast. The neighborhoods our Dad would move us to in North Texas didn't have any real cultural identity. It was people from various backgrounds living in a modern neighborhood. Reading the book On The Road by Jack Kerouac in college about the Beat Generation and the constant on the move travels reminded me a lot of my Dad. As a family we would move all the time from

one neighborhood to the next, mostly in the Dallas-Fort Worth area and jobs never seemed to pan out or last long for my Dad. In 1979-1980 he decided to pack up and move us all to Italy where his biological sister lived. It was always a spur of the moment type thing. I have vague memories of the plane stopping in Iceland before flying to Malpensa Airport in Northern Italy. I was too young to remember if my Dad went there to visit his sister before deciding to move to Italy but he says he had to learn Italian after arriving and maybe it came back to him faster because he spoke it as a child. He also got the help of a Professor Ritti who was an academic his sister Rosa knew. I remember once arriving in Italy we all went into Rosa's house in a town called Ferno near Malpensa Airport and she squeezed my cheek with her hand. My Mom would randomly blurt something out in tongue with her hand up because she was Pentecostal, especially under stress or during emotional moments. My Dad would tell Rosa it was because she was Native American. This was partly true. My maternal grandfather was half Native American. Like many typical Italian houses Rosa lived in a stucco building and she was married to Nicole, a man she met that lived in a small village in the Alps and was a sheep herder. He was a stocky man with a red face complexion who wore suspenders and had a love for wine and cheese. Rosa also had two

children our age. I remember for breakfast they would eat cookies with warm milk before rushing off to school. It was the colder weather months and the house was still cold when they woke up. The climate in Northern Italy was cold in the winter, the climate was similar to Canada or the East Coast US, although the summer months could also be sweltering. I forget how we ended up finding a place but it was a two story stucco building connected to other houses with an open square that was located in Ferno, Italy. It was next to a Catholic Auditorium that I remember had nuns. We quickly made friends with the other neighbor's children and eventually became proficient in speaking Italian. I would often ask what a word meant while playing throughout my time living there. I mostly played with another boy my age named Francisco who lived next door, my sisters also made friends with a neighbor girl that was Francisco's sister and I developed a crush on a shy neighbor girl around my age named Martí Alba who lived on the second floor adjacent to us but would rarely come out to play. Her family seemed more well to do and mostly kept to themselves. Like many of my crushes on girls no kiss or anything came of it but I was a cute kid so I got the sense she liked me too. Martí Alba would make an expression on her face, squinting her nose staring out at us. After becoming acclimated with our neighbors and the town

of Ferno we eventually started going to school like other Italian children.

Going to School in Ferno, Italy and Luigi

The school in Ferno was comparable to a private school here in America. We had to wear uniforms that looked similar to a tracksuit. I remember one Halloween or what the Italian's call La Festa where students came to school dressed up in costumes, I came just wearing casual clothes and a superman t-shirt. The teacher thought it was funny or adorable and teased me about it in front of the other students and I started to blush. We all stood in class wearing our costumes while the teacher looked us over. I was behind other students in my studies or maybe the teacher saw it was from being a foreign student so I was put with a remedial student also lagging behind named Luigi and we became good friends. I have a memory of being moved to a desk outside of the classroom where I was seated with Luigi. If Luigi and I got loud she would walk out of the classroom to check on us. I remember the teacher in Italy would pull a student's ear if they misbehaved or were not paying attention in class. I think sitting outside the classroom with Luigi was only temporary though. I spent most of my time going to school in the classroom with the other students.. Luigi invited me over to his house

and at first I procrastinated but finally decided to go and when I arrived Luigi was crying thinking I was not going to show up. I guess we were similar in ways although I did play with my neighbor Francisco a lot more and visited Luigi only on occasion because he lived further away. I remember Luigi's parents seemed normal enough and would talk about the TV soap opera Dallas. In fact, they were better off than my family or what is considered middle class. I have one memory of visiting Luigi and we were outside his house. Nearby there was a field with discarded trash. A kid older than us was looking through discarded porn magazines. Luigi and I did not understand why he would waste his time looking at pornography but he said we'd understand once we reached his age. Like my dad I believe Luigi may have been adopted. There was one field trip at school where the class visited the local cemetery that also had a crypt. The class walked around looking at the gravestones and reading the names. We stopped at one gravestone that appeared to be Luigi's biological parents. He appeared somber, not really saying anything facing the gravestone. I remember visiting Luigi close to Christmas and his family had a Nativity set Christmas Manger that was common for Italian families to display around Christmas. This time Luigi was serious. I can't remember if he wanted to give me a figurine from the Nativity scene or

couldn't but this time I stayed quiet since he took it very seriously. There was a bully at school who threatened to beat us up if he ever saw Luigi and I outside the school and one summer day we were walking down the street in Ferno trying to get to the auditorium near my home and much to our dismay we saw the bully walking toward us in the street with no one around. He came up to us and said unzip your pants and show me your penis and he won't beat us up. We both hesitated, I was petrified and felt the blood rushing from my head but we both unzipped our pants and took out our penis to show him and he stared and then laughed and walked away. I looked around to my relief, no one saw what happened, the street was empty. We both quietly started walking again and talked about the bully in a serious manner and then it led to uncontrollable laughter. Nothing came of the bully after that. Another incident involved my big sister who was getting bullied at school by a boy her age. So much so that she came home from school crying. It involved a rock throwing altercation where a big rock barely missed my sister's head. This alerted my Dad who proceeded to dress up as an American Indian half naked like he was a child again playing Cowboys & Indians and run around the town square making Indian whoo-whoo-whoo calls. I guess he was trying to scare or intimidate the bully showing he could be like a savage

Indian since we came from America. My Dad had reverence for Native Americans believing the Native American tribe was the ideal society. This of course greatly embarrassed my sister who was in tears and had to go to school the next day. The spectacle my Dad put on got around town and Rosa, my Dad's sister still brings up the story to this day. My father tried to save face claiming it was on Halloween but I remember it was not when everyone was dressed up like one of the carnival festivals or what is called Carnivale where locals dressed in traditional attire and costumes marching in a parade. I recall my Dad taking us to those where I would stand on the street and watch the parade go by with marching musicians and people wearing traditional clothing and there were also outdoor markets with lots of local vendors. I recall one vendor had many toy robots. Some were battery powered and could move their legs with flashing lights and others were the Japanese style Mecha.

Northern Italy Forest and Lakes

Ferno, Italy was also close to a forest that had cuckoo birds and wild chestnuts that the locals would pick and roast in the oven during the fall. I remember the legend of the sheep man. Local lore of a man that was half sheep who lived out in the woods. One day my neighbor friend Francisco, Luigi, and I

went to explore the woods and find the sheep man. One of them believed he saw the sheep man and knew where he lived so all three of us walked deep in the woods and started exploring. It seemed we were doing a lot of walking and in the distance I could make out an old shack where there was a clearing. Then I heard screaming and a man in the distance came out of a shack holding up a rake running toward us. He had a long white beard and in a way did resemble a goat. Luigi and Francisco started yelling, "sheep man! sheep man!" and we started to run. I remember being so frightened that my legs felt like molasses and Francisco and Luigi were ahead of me running as fast as they could while laughing. Everything felt like it was moving in slow motion. I forgot when we stopped running but I guess the man holding a rake in the distance stopped chasing us once he thought he scared us off. It was probably a farmer or hermit trying to ward off intruders. Another memory is exploring the woods with my father. During that time in the early 80s there were still remnants of World War II. Northern Italy or the Lombardy region still was fighting late in the war and there were still bullet ridden cement structures that nature had reclaimed in fields and in the woods. Near a structure thick in the woods I saw a war helmet propped up by a stick inserted in the ground like a soldier was buried there. My dad claims it's no

longer there and was an American helmet. I remember it looked like it wasn't touched in 40 years. Out of respect for the dead of the fallen soldier we just left the helmet where it was and went about our way. I also visited the forest after it snowed. I believe I went there with my sisters and not just by myself. It was like I was in a picturesque scene in a landscape painting. White snow and trees all around, along with it being very quiet with little noise, gave a sense of peacefulness. There was only the sound of me breathing and my shoes scrunching through the snow. Looking around at all the snow and trees distorted my perspective like the forest and white landscape that could go on forever. I could easily see how a person could get disoriented and lost if there were no foot impressions to backtrack leading back out of the woods. I have memories of my dad driving us to the lakes in Northern Italy, the ones closer to where we lived that weren't such a driving distance. I couldn't name the lakes we went to but northern Italy has many beautiful lakes fed by the rivers in the region and water from the Alps. There are lakeside hotels that are a popular honeymoon destination; little villages with small restaurants and shops that cater to tourists and locals; some of the lakes are big enough to have boats and even car ferries that transport vehicles from one side of the lake to the other. Rich affluent people in Italy also

have summer homes there escaping the heat going to the Alps. I have one memory of our Dad taking us to a lake near Ferno and playing on a stream with rocks standing waste deep in a shallow water area, my sisters were also there in the water, all of the sudden I felt a severe pinching pain to my penis and started shouting in pain, on my penis there is a little mark where I was circumcised, my sister's were wondering what was wrong, I ran out of the water to my Dad and pulled down my shorts, I showed him my penis where there was a sharp pinching pain but he could not see anything wrong or an injury and the pain eventually went away, the sun started to set with a view of the lake with the stream pouring into it over rocks, we did not have any food so my Dad had the idea to go to a nearby corn field and picked some corn, then started a fire over rocks at the side of the stream bed and started to roast corn on the cob, there is a lot of farm land and agriculture in the region fed by rivers and water from the Alps, it flows into the valley from the mountains, he also tried to heat some water over the fire saying that boiling lake water will kill the bacteria in a metal container he found.

Big Sister Receives Communion

My dad was a devoted Catholic and I remember having to go to mass along with

my other siblings at the Catholic church building in town. My big sister received communion there dressed up in a white dress. After the communion ceremony with other children her age, Jordan almonds or almonds covered in a white candy coating were handed out and children who just received communion would go door to door where people would give them money. I remember it was also a pleasant sunny day when my big sister received Communion.

Once I went to the auditorium near where we lived. It was either my father or neighbor Francisco who was with me and we opened a door to a room where there were children inside sitting behind school desks and a Catholic priest lecturing to the class. He welcomed us to sit down so we were polite and sat down, it was something similar to bible school. On the wall was hanging a painting of Jesus wearing modern clothes. We awkwardly sat there until bible study was over not wanting to be rude and leave.

Another memory of the auditorium was the smell of honey sickles that was all over the fence in the back where there was a soccer (football) field. There was a game where two teams had a flag hanging on a post on opposite sides. The players would wear ribbons behind their pants like flag football in America and would run and try to get the ribbon from the opposite team's post without getting their ribbon pulled by the opposing

side. It was a fun and chaotic scene of players running around trying to reach the other teams flag without getting their ribbon pulled. In Italy we got accustomed to watching Italian TV mostly cartoons at our age and my Dad would take me to the movies on occasion like in America. There was a boxing cartoon named Ashita no Joe, also known as Rocky Joe that was really popular and I would discuss the latest episodes with my neighbor friend Francisco. As episodes evolved Ashita no Joe had a harder time boxing his opponents and in one episode it looked like he was out for the count or was going to lose. In disbelief I felt strangely aroused and ran away from the TV into our bedroom and stared at my red penis. Then I didn't know about masturbation because I was too young for puberty. After that I stopped watching Ashita no Joe, watching a cartoon character get pummeled and go down for the count each episode was too much. There were also the anime & robot or Mecha cartoons like Vultron, Mazinger, Battle of the Planets, and others that were similar in nature. I remember seeing the cartoon Lupin that was very popular in Italy. These cartoons were very influential on my sisters who would draw their own cartoon characters even after moving back to America. I remember going to the movies to see Banana Joe, a Bud Spencer film. I still remember the theme song to that movie. Our

family did not eat a ton of Italian food, still the American variety like making a sandwich. When we would visit my sister Rosa however all the food was authentic Italian like a bowl of spaghetti with meat sauce, pecorino romano cheese was on the table to grate on your spaghetti; Rosa also made Pastina soup that was popular in the colder months. It was little tiny pieces of pasta cooked in a broth.

Getting Lost at the Vatican

One day my Dad decided he wanted to go to Rome to see the Vatican and Pope John Paul II. My Dad then was a devoted Catholic, before moving to Italy he claimed to have seen an apparition of Jesus and the Virgin Mary in Grand Prairie, Texas near Mountain Creek Lake. Later in life he started to have doubts about what he saw claiming it could have been exposure to chemicals at a job he was working at. I forget what the occasion was to go to Rome or if it was one of his spur-of-the-moment decisions but he could only afford to take a few people with him. It was decided my Mom would stay and watch my little sisters and take me and my big sister. I remember the long train ride and watching the olive trees staring out the window taking in views of the Italian countryside. We arrived at the train station in Rome at night and my Dad, not having much money, decided we would sleep in the grass near the

train station after chaotically walking around deciding what to do. We all woke up laying in the grass and made the trek to Vatican City. Once arriving we took a break at St. Peter's Square where there was a round fountain area. It was crowded with lots of people. My Dad pointed out the Pope was giving a speech from a window. I was then struck with fear looking around. I did not see my Dad nor my sister. Where did they go? I thought. I waited awhile but they did not return then the fear inside me started to build where I was looking around almost crying. I thought to myself the worst, a kid lost in a big city like Rome but wisely I decided to stay put and my Dad and sister returned happy I was still there and said they were looking for me. While at the Vatican I remember we did go inside and may have also visited the crypt. I do remember as a kid in Italy our Dad taking us to a Cathedral, it could have been the one in Milan and walking up the steps for the view in the lookout tower. My Dad wasn't going to stay another night in Rome because he could not afford a hotel so we headed to the train station and took a train back to Milan and from there Ferno.

Italy was Not All Good Memories

Memories of living in Italy were not all good. My Dad would sometimes have to ask his sister Rosa for financial help but they would

not always help him and there were times we were hungry. I forget if my Mom got food when in need from a pantry or from nuns but I remember there were some lean times. My Dad worked off and on, I can't remember if he started becoming a welder then but I remember when unemployed he could get a job through a distant Italian relative of Rosa's or her husband Nicole assembling bicycle parts like bicycle pedals. I visited once and it was in a stucco building, the room was small with bicycle parts scattered about a table. The business owner wasn't a nice person, my father says he was abusive to his family and may have had mafia affiliations, he would curse and strike his children or wife using a cane when angered. My mother had her struggles living in Italy, the Italian language did not come easy to her like it did to us because we were young and had neighborhood playmates. She struggled trying to learn Italian and had trouble acclimating with the culture in Italy. Even with a tutor my Mom had trouble learning the language. The people in Italy and Europe can be a bit colder culturally than America with blank expressions or a sad expression which is a normal body language to them. We didn't play with Rosa's children Dino or Fabio much even though they were a similar age, Dino being the oldest, I think one reason is because Rosa's house was not close by like the neighbor's we befriended. My father

always described Rosa's children as aloof, even to this day. One of them may have attended my big sister's class and was the same age as her. If something happened at school word would get back to Rosa. There was an incident where a nosy old lady thought she saw one of my little sister's take a bread roll at a local store, word got around to Rosa who informed my father. My sisters were appalled and denied such an incident ever took place to the point of breaking down in tears. There was also conflict over religion between my parents and this was exacerbated living in Italy because there weren't many Protestant or Evangelical churches or any in the area. My mom also did not have any friends except her Italian language tutor who understood English and was helping her speak the Italian language. I went with my Mom once to the tutor's house and remember she had a small garden outside. This is not unusual in Italy, many Italian families have small gardens and some will also raise rabbits because it's considered a cheap form of meat. I tried rabbit once that was served with fried potatoes at Rosa's house and it had a distinct taste, different from chicken or beef but still tasted good. Many Americans would be horrified by eating a furry creature like a rabbit as they are seen as pets like a gerbil or furry critters that roam in the wild. The advice some Italians gave my Dad about my Mother having

trouble adjusting is she needed a good beating and that's how women are kept in line. Italy is a more male dominated society or chauvinistic. This may have to do with the Catholic religion or latin culture. My Dad tried this approach but it was not in his nature. I vaguely remember my Mom saying he tried to strike her because of what other Italians were telling him. My Mom also had an issue with hoarding. There were bags of clothes in our room and stuff piled in the kitchen. Once my Dad tried to get tough by putting all our dirty clothes in a giant tub in the open space outside where all the neighbors could see. It was a tub Italians use to stomp tomatoes and grapes, they then jar the stomped tomatoes for later cooking. If you are thinking it's gross to put your feet in a tub to stomp tomatoes, I believe the feet were washed beforehand and there were so many tomatoes or grapes that it did not make a difference. He placed the tub outside in the stucco building square forcing us to stomp on the clothes in water and scrub the clothes with detergent and a washboard while all the neighbors watched. We were reluctant at first and some of my sisters were crying, maybe I was crying too. I forgot how that turned out but it was not a pleasant experience and never happened again because it was not an efficient way to do laundry. I remember one winter it was so cold, we had one small heater in the kitchen room area where my

parents stayed and our bedroom was separate as if you walked outside on a patio hallway to an adjacent room. My sisters and I shared a room with bunk beds. My father may have insisted I have my own space because I was a male. There was no heating in the room so we would stay in the kitchen until it was time for bed. The bed's had thick blankets in order to keep us warm. We may have also wore layers to keep warm going to bed. When we woke up it was really cold and we would rush to the kitchen and gather around the heater. Italians like Rosa's family wore pajamas or clothing like long johns to keep warm. It is said Europeans do not bathe often and I think this has to do with the cold winters and the cost of heating and utilities. I recall we had to heat water by pan and take it down to the restroom that had a tub for bathing. It was like a type of outhouse where we had to walk down the cement stairs since our family stayed on the second floor. The steps going downstairs outside were made out of cement. I remember seeing a photo of me from that time wearing bell bottoms standing up the steps near the kitchen and another photo of me on top of a tall playground slide ready to slide down that was in a Northern Italian town we visited closer to the mountains. My Mom was fed up with Italy and in contact with her parents back in Texas. The decision was made to return to America and my grandparents

would send the money. My dad may have been reluctant, I think he landed a job, it may have been a welding job and we were in Italian school and could now speak the language, and more and more accustomed to the Italian lifestyle but he gave in and my maternal grandparents paid for the airline tickets. This is a moment in history that my grandparents and my Dad would question looking back. Would we have been better off raised in Italy? I forget exactly how we left, my Dad may have been behind on rent or in a dispute with the Italian landlord but I do remember it was abrupt. There was only time to say goodbye to our neighbor friends. My sister's were emotional, my big sister cried and said goodbye to the neighbor girl who was Francisco's sister. I don't think Martí Alba was present or my big sister may have said goodbye to her at her door since Martí Alba was shy and didn't come outside much. I felt remorse that I didn't get to say goodbye to my school friend Luigi and always wondered how he took it. We gathered our belongings and dashed off to the airport.

The Return To America - Arriving In Comanche, Texas

On the return trip back to America we flew out of Malpensa Airport and there was a layover in Holland before making the flight across the Atlantic ocean to America. I

remember my Dad bought a Smurf comic book with the Dutch language in the cartoon captions. The Dutch used a lot of syllables and when read back in English it sounded funny. After our plane landed at DFW airport we were driven to Comanche, Texas by our grandparents. Comanche is a small town located in the Texas Hill country, west of Fort Worth, my grandparents always took the more scenic route down Highway 377 that went from one small town to another with nothing but countryside and a two-lane highway in between. After a two or three hour drive from the airport which seemed like a long time for a young kid like me we arrived at my Grandparents 1960s ranch-style house off of Highway 16 once entering Comanche. My grandfather turned off the highway to a caliche rock gravel road that went straight to the house after about a hundred yards. The gravel road looped around a large tree in front of the house to go back to the highway with a garage to the side of their house. My grandparents ranch style house had a little yard area fenced off to grassland for cattle grazing or for growing grass to bail hay and there was a pond that could be seen from the front porch beyond a barbed wire fence. The pond was on someone else's land, initially it belonged to my grandfather when he first bought the property but later sold some of it to the local car dealer. The brick house had a large open

space porch with a green outdoor turf rug. The inside of the house had the smell of tobacco and the curtains were still in the style of the 1960s. There was a hat rack with many different hats and a grandfather clock by the door. My grandfather liked English bulldogs and he had a bulldog around this time to greet us. A rope was hanging from the porch ceiling that the bulldog could bite and swing back and forth. My grandfather, known by his name Bill Day in town, seemed delighted to see me. At first I was like the boy he never had but later would favor my more socially outgoing alpha big sister. As I reflect back, the relationship with my grandparents reminded me of Charles Dickens' novel *Great Expectations* or *Story of the Stone* by Cao Xueqin - a famous Chinese novel about a young male that could not hold the family's dynasty. Even at that age I could feel my grandfather's initial fondness of seeing me as unnerving like they were sizing up pets and which grandchild could be a pedigree. As we piled into the house with our belongings my sisters and I would forget to speak English and talk to my Grandfather real fast in Italian and he was taken aback and had to remind us we were speaking in a different language. He got out his portable tape recorder he used for his radio job and started recording us talking in Italian by telling us to say something. He would play this back later when we were much older and had forgotten the language.

My Mom and Dad were in a good mood like when first visiting relatives and my Dad always stayed cordial, not turning down a slice of pie and ice cream with a cup of coffee. My father would have a sort of smirk or smile on his face and kindly accept any food. My Dad considered my Grandfather a salesman and later my grandfather determined that everyone with exception of my big sister took a liking after our father and referred to us as "The Watsons" in a joking manner or the "Watson Wrecking Crew."

My Grandparents Were Old Fashioned & Traditional

My grandfather was the youngest of a large farm family who grew up in the Texas Panhandle during the Great Depression - part of what is termed the 'Greatest Generation.' My Grandfather's father or my great grandfather was involved in agriculture and had a role in government - something to do with farmers mobilizing after the dust storms that wreaked havoc on crops. I remember seeing an old black and white group photo of my great grandfather and farmers from the dust bowl era. My grandfather had a high reverence for President Franklin Roosevelt. My Grandfather had mostly brothers and they grew up well disciplined where everyone had chores. When my grandfather

and his brothers reached adulthood they left the house and were on their own either by joining the military or going off to college. My grandfather wanted to become a pilot for the Army Air Force which is an old name for the US Air Force but it was discovered he was color blind and had to settle on being an aircraft mechanic stationed in New Mexico. He tells the story of having to hitchhike after being discharged from the US Army Air Force and the cliche of walking miles to school as a child. He met my grandmother Vernine Day, who's surname was Franks before they married, at Texas Tech University. My grandfather competed against his older brother courting my grandmother, eventually winning her over. My grandmother earned a Master's Degree in English and was an English teacher at the local high school. She was a reserved person who spent much time in her room reading books. She could give us a complex by her black beady eye stare. My Grandfather was part stake owner in a local AM radio station where he sold adds and also a disk jokey. He tells the story of having to wake up very early in the morning everyday to turn on the radio transmitter and give the morning news even though sometimes he did not want to get out of bed. Everyone in town knew my grandfather and called him by his first name Bill. My grandfather tells the story that someone in town would approach him real

happy and yell hey Bill! and if my grandfather did not know who the person was, he would smile back like he was happy to see them too mumbling a made up name. He was considered a nice person to the locals and would sometimes sing in a quartet at the local Methodist Church. There was an old piano in the house near the hat rack where he practiced songs with his church quartet. The piano sat there mostly unplayed with the occasional tune up and would only be used when the need arose. My Dad was completely different and had a more Italian share-all attitude toward family. How Rosa's family yelled over each other and talked really loud around the dinner table was different from how my maternal Grandparents were brought up. My grandparents were more like a Norman Rockwell painting or Mayberry from the The Andy Griffith Show, the town of Comanche was also this way. Like most small towns, it had a town square with the city hall building in the middle that had a judge, mayor, and municipal employees and in the square surrounded by small businesses like a drug store, hat and boot shop, furniture store, barber shop, a Radio Shack, and a post office close to the town center. There was a little log cabin and historical marker commemorating the Comanche Indian near the main highway at the town center since Comanche, Texas used to be Comanche Indian territory.

Trying To Settle Down in Comanche

My Grandfather, upon us returning from Italy, envisioned us settling down in Comanche and living the small town life which he preferred. There was a planned sit-down to discuss our future around the dinner table on our next move. I remember the Dallas Cowboys were on TV with quarterback Danny White and coach Tom Landry. By then the Cowboys were not that good of a team, I think the year we returned was 1983 or 1984, I remember my grandfather commenting on the team as he smoked his pipe. He could blow smoke rings with his mouth when exhaling tobacco smoke. We had just arrived and it was time to unwind and relax. Later in the evening we met around the dinner table to decide our next move. My grandfather liked to air things out with everyone in attendance. The plan was to live with my Grandparents until my parents could find employment and their own place in Comanche. At first I don't believe my father was necessarily opposed to the idea, my Mother however was not fond of small town life and would say "Mother, can I say something" responding to our grandmother as we were gathered around the table. Shortly after we enrolled in the local elementary school and I was lagging behind the other students. I remember having trouble with valves and sentence structure

due to my Italian education and my slow learning ability. Sentence phrases in Italian are almost backwards or in reverse similar to how Yoda speaks in the movie Star Wars - this has to do with the Latin language. Still to this day I believe my grammar and spelling was affected by those crucial early years of a mixed education. I remember my Dad describing some of the jobs he tried to hold down in the country, one involved transporting chickens to be slaughtered and they would all try to escape. Things started to fall apart after maybe a month of living there. Tensions started to brew because of all the people sharing my grandparents house. We would sometimes take trips to break up the monotony by driving to Brownwood, Texas - a town 30 miles west of Comanche on Highway 377 heading toward Abilene. Brownwood is where my parents met in college, it had a small town vibe but was bigger than the small town of Comanche. I have one memory of walking in Brownwood a short distance from the car and a middle aged Black woman was walking to the door of her house. I yelled to my big sister trying to be funny, look there is a nigger! The woman looked upset and went inside, closing the door. Instead of laughing my big sister scolded me and said it was not okay to call black people that word. I felt embarrassed and bad for the woman wondering how she must have felt judging by her reaction. I

probably got the word from my Dad who would occasionally use it in a joking manner. One day my Dad in true Gene Watson form got us all in the car and abruptly left without telling my Grandparents. He had gotten a job at Texas Instruments in Dallas and decided to pack up the family and leave. I believe my Dad also had ulterior motives as you will later read about his dream of building something that fascinated him as a child - a flying saucer. Yes, that's right - a flying craft or VTOL piloted by himself that would make him rich and famous, having a Wright Brothers moment. My grandfather or Grandmother must have caught on to my Dad bailing by overhearing the commotion of us all piling into the car. My Dad eventually got his own car and used it to find a job in the city. As we were driving down the highway leaving Comanche our Grandfather appeared behind us driving his 1984 Oldsmobile honking the horn and trying to cut in front of us with my big sister and all of us screaming at my Dad but it was to no avail, there was no stopping my Dad from leaving. We lost sight of my Grandfather's Oldsmobile and continued on our way. My mother too was itching to leave due to her dislike of small town life. This mostly had to do with some embarrassment she had due to a mental handicap. When she reached adulthood and was in college she suffered from epileptic type seizures. My Dad attributes her seizures

to her father accidentally dropping a box on her head when she was a small child. Once she had a seizure pulling down her bathing suit in front of everyone while standing on the diving board at the swimming pool while attending Tarleton State University in Stephenville, Texas. After that embarrassing incident my Grandparents moved her to Howard Payne University in Brownwood, Texas where she met my Dad who was also a student. My Dad describes her following him around after they talked about religion and met each other while sitting on a park bench. My grandfather did not like my dad when my parents abruptly decided to get married while still in college and didn't find him as a suitable mate. Likewise my Dad's foster mother Betty Watson is Sherman, Texas did not get along with my mother. On the highway out of Comanche we passed through other towns on our way to Dallas and eventually everyone calmed down as we were now on a new adventure to the city.

My Dad Moving Abruptly To the Garland, Texas Suburbs

We made our way to the city leaving the country first going through Benbrook, Texas then getting on the freeway and passing through Fort Worth as I looked out the car window to see the Downtown Fort Worth skyline and then passing through Arlington,

Texas and passing the theme park Six Flags Over Texas that could be seen from the freeway and viewing the roller coaster ride that made loops thinking how scary it would be to ride it and on our way to Dallas where the downtown Dallas skyline became visible. On our way there, my Dad as a surprise handed me a Texas Instruments Speak & Spell toy. It had a little digit screen, you'd type a word on these little alphabet buttons and out came a computer voice repeating the word. We exited the freeway in North Dallas and I could see American urban culture that was missing in Italy or Comanche. African Americans were gathered outside a convenience store wearing sneakers and parachute pants blasting RnB or breakdancing music on a boombox. My dad found a house to rent in Garland, Texas, a suburb of Northeast Dallas. It was in a working class neighborhood with brick homes and a small front yard, driveway and backyard that was fenced from the neighbors and alley for the trash. The streets were laid out like a grid with all the houses next to each other in a straight line as you would go down the street. There was a convenience store or filling station where the main highway meets when you exit the neighborhood. All the neighborhood streets had stop signs on each corner. It was something you would typically see in America or what is called suburban sprawl. Garland

and North Dallas were typical to many US cities where it's hard to distinguish one city from the next. Stop lights at intersections, fast food chains on the corner, old shopping centers, a chain store, a grocery store here and there, the occasional shopping mall, highways and freeways that connect one surrounding city to the next. Many people around the world like in Italy picture Texas as a Western movie or imagine a desert like in West Texas instead of the modern suburban sprawl of cities like Dallas that consists of highways, stop lights, and cookie cutter neighborhoods. It was easy to forget we were ever in Italy where there were stucco buildings with brown Italian roof tiles, brick laid streets, an old Catholic church in the town center that would ring a bell, a forest with Cuckoos, and mountains like the Alps that could be seen in the distance. It was the land of fast food chains, convenient stores, and stop lights like before we moved to Italy living in Grand Prairie but I was so young that this was all new to me again. My dad arrived at the house he was renting and we all got out of the four door pea green 1970s used car he was driving. Once inside the house was empty with no furniture. There was a kitchen area with sink, living room where the TV and couch would be, and bedrooms down a hallway connecting a bathroom with a toilet, bathtub, mirror above the sink. The walls of the house were white

and textured with the occasional ceiling fan with a light bulb like in the living room. I forget how the house was furnished but we eventually settled in. Like in Italy we quickly made friends with the neighbor kids. I remember as we were moving our belongings into the house there was a kid older than me staring from across the street and when I was alone getting stuff out of the car he said I'm going to kick your ass pointing at me. Immediately I was taken aback and filled with fear, a bully older than me lived across the street and he wanted to beat me up. The next day I peeked out the window and was a little apprehensive to go outside remembering what the kid across the street said. I ventured outside seeing no one was out there and to my fright the kid across the street approached me on his BMX bicycle and said his name was Dusty. I asked why he wanted to beat me up and he laughed and said he was trying to scare me, just checking out the new neighbors moving in. My sisters would also make friends with some girls who were neighbors. Dusty looked like the typical 80s kid. He had somewhat of a mullet and he liked BMX dirt bikes and was old enough to be into girls. I believe Dusty may have had an older brother that was in high school but I don't remember. Dusty was in Middle School and I knew I'd be going to Middle School too in a few years. Dusty, not wasting time, wanted me to come along and hang out so I

told my parents I'll be playing with Dusty the kid across the street. My Dad didn't seem to care. He smiled and said alright play with your new friend and that's how my adventures with Dusty started. He asked where I was from and I told him we just came from Italy and spent a little time with our Grandparents after coming back to America. I would have to interrupt Dusty when he was talking and ask what a common word meant. He was always astonished that I didn't know what a common English word that everybody uses means. Sometimes Dusty would tell me I was speaking to him in Italian and I would have to repeat what I said in English. I forget when we enrolled in school, it may have still been summer break for students, Yes, I remember it was the summer months. I have no chronology of the adventures I would get into since it was so long ago but do remember some of the things that happened. One day Dusty and I were sitting on the car talking, he was asking more about me and we kept talking then a car drove by and a man stuck a gun out the window and pointed it at us, Dusty instinctively rolled off the car in a split second and got on the ground, I just froze in my tracks. The person who pointed a gun out the window laughed and wasn't going to pull the trigger - the car kept on driving. I was amazed by Dusty's quick reaction like he was a trained soldier, this helped us break the ice and he said I would

have been dead if it was a real drive-by shooting. He showed me how to roll off the car and get on the ground the next time something like that happened and was also fond of doing a karate drop kick where you spin around kicking your leg in the air as self-defense and because it looked cool. Dusty was older and into girls. He would say when you walk into your classroom just yell the word pussy over and over again. Dusty would claim he would sit at his school desk with an erection and a random girl in the class would jump on him and start humping him with the female teacher was watching, saying nothing like the teacher was sex starved and wanted to be part of the action. I had my doubts about his claims and was not into sex yet but I thought it was humorous and would go along for the camaraderie. He also asked me why I didn't try to have sex with my sisters, Dusty didn't have any sisters in his family. I told him I didn't find my sisters attractive and told him it's hard to understand unless you have sisters. He said if he was in my family he would screw my sisters three or four times a day. I didn't want to argue any more and just let Dusty think what he wanted knowing he did not have the same siblings. There was another kid in the neighborhood that was Dusty's friend and one summer night we were walking and talking and stopped at Dusty's front porch while he went inside, the topic was sex and in my loud voice

I asked what it's like to feel real pussy or something to that effect and Dusty walked out and said don't talk about that on the porch people inside can hear you. I felt a bit embarrassed, we continued to walk down the neighborhood streets talking about a range of topics typical American boys were into like bikes, or World War III. Dusty was also into Cold War hysteria where the U.S.S.R. was America's foe. This was during Ronald Reagan's era and the Berlin Wall was years away from falling. I recall when I went to public school in Garland we would have a nuclear war drill that was similar to a tornado drill. Dusty and I would go to a wooded area near a creek and pretend that World War III happened and we were going to fight an invading force. He used a stick pretending it to be a machine gun. I remember Dusty did wear army pants. I vaguely remember throwing Chinese Stars at trees, pretending to throw grenades, and him talking about M-80 fireworks although we didn't have any. M-80's were powerful fireworks and Dusty described the dangers of popping an M-80 if you threw it like a grenade. One day in the creek we came across a tree where the trunk fell across acting like a bridge. Dusty, having little fear, slowly walked across the trunk to the other side and then walked back and wanted me to follow. I started to walk across but then became scared. It had to be 10 feet down

where there were rocks and a small stream of water. I knew if I fell I would have broken a leg so started to crawl on all fours having a fear of heights and turned around and went back. Dusty was disappointed I wouldn't try to walk across the log calling me a pussy but later conceded and we went back home. One day Dusty just came back from the creek and was excited. He said a kid challenged him to a fight, he would bring his friends and Dusty would bring me, we would all have a brawl. It was going to be a big brawl. He kept yelling lets go kick some ass! C'mon it'll be fun. Not wanting to fight I tried to delay and talk him out of it. I think we eventually did go to the creek but no one was there and Dusty was mad. He said if we went right away they would have probably been there to fight. My sisters also made friends and I have one memory of going to a neighbor's house down the block that had cable television. I was there with my sisters and we were dancing to music on MTV. I did a dance like an Egyptian curving my arms and hands while standing on the neighbors couch. I remember Michael Jackson was big at the time and became a pop music icon, the TV show Silver Spoons was very popular. My Dad was out in the garage, his dream was to build a home made flying saucer that would take flight and usher in a new era of flying vehicles. I found this to be a fun side of my dad but was still a little embarrassed how others viewed it. Dusty

came riding on his bicycle to the garage and asked my Dad what he was doing and my Dad told him about trying to build a flying saucer and I cringed waiting for Dusty's reaction. Instead of laughing or making fun of him Dusty listened intensely and knotted his head as a sign of emotional intelligence showing genuine interest. When we left to go play Dusty said he thought my Dad was smart and what he was doing was cool. One day my Dad invited Dusty to go to the movies with us and see the science fiction movie 2010: The Year We Make Contact, a follow up to Stanley Kubrick's 2001: A Space Odyssey. We went to the movie theater and I forget if it was the dollar movie theater, a theater that showed movies out of regular movie theater rotation that had a discounted ticket price, we sat in the theater after buying popcorn and watched the movie, I was worried that Dusty would think it was boring since it was not like a Rambo action movie and slow in parts but he was silent staring at the movie screen. I remember there was the classic movie line, "a piece of cake, a piece of pie" during a tense space walk moment. After the movie my Dad drove us home in his beat up used car that smelled of car fumes and discussed the validity of the movie's premise. Dusty thanked my Dad after we got home and said he liked the movie. When the summer started to come to a close it was time to enroll in the public school. I had butterflies during the

enrollment process and didn't like the thought of attending school. The public school in Garland, Texas was different from the public school in the small town of Comanche, and of course the more private type school I attended in Italy where students dressed in the same uniform. I was now back to suburban living in a big city or metroplex and there were more minority people like black and Latino kids. During P.E. class black kids would do a backspin, breakdance move on the gym floor while the PE teacher's back was turned, and the PE teacher would turn around and see it warning students you could lose your hair and go bald from head spinning. I heard some minority students (blacks & latinos) talk about the Egyptian Lover, a Los Angeles electro-funk artist and later the movie *Purple Rain* starring Prince. The black kids and Latinos would sometimes say cracker or honkey referring to white people usually in a joking manner, or white people can't dance and white people could not use the n-word as I learned returning to America from Italy. I was now in a more urban environment living in the city and the public school system was a type of indoctrination to the cultural norms of my generation. When school was out I would walk home with my big sister. The public school was close enough to our house that we could walk. It was in a neighborhood where we had to cross a highway that went past a

convenience store into our neighborhood where we would walk three or four blocks back to our house. Like in Italy I was susceptible to bullying. There were two black kids who were bigger than me that wanted to beat me up after school. The neighborhood we lived in was mixed racially but it was close to a mostly a black area where the bullies were from. My big sister would come to my defense running the two black kids off standing her ground and yelling at them when they would approach me while we walked home. During the late Summer or Fall, I remember the weather was getting colder and it was football season. Dusty saw that some of the other neighborhood kids formed a football team and would play in a field. So Dusty and the other neighbor kid that would come by discussed forming our own team, even going as far as buying shoulder pads, football helmets, and football uniforms to distinguish teams but the uniform never transpired due to cost, we just wore normal clothes. We joined in the football games amongst neighbor kids in an empty plot of land or field and it was three against three or four against four. Dusty discovered I had the ability to bluff other players and make sharp cuts that I was a really good running back so he would always hand me the ball. We played games for awhile, maybe three or four weeks and I got pretty roughed up. My fingernail became

bruised and it ended up falling off. One day Dusty informed me some bad news and knew I would take it hard, he said his family was moving, his father got a new job and that he would no longer come by and play because the neighborhood wasn't close by; and had to enroll in another school but he told me that he would be able to buy a Mongoose BMX dirt bike and would come by one day and show me his new bike. I doubted I would ever see Dusty again and had a sinking feeling; felt sad I was losing a good friend. The other neighborhood kid only came because of Dusty.

My Dad Gets Fired From Texas Instruments

I forget when my Dad lost his job or got fired from Texas Instruments but he could not make rent. The decision was made to move back to Comanche, Texas with my grandparents while we were still attending school in Garland. When my Dad made a decision it was usually spur-of-the-moment. We all piled into the car with as much belongings as possible during the evening hours. Like saying goodbye to our neighbor friends in Italy my big sister was crying and acting very emotional telling her neighbor girlfriends we were moving and exchanging goodbyes; she said it would be the last time she ever saw them. I believe psychologically this and other moves my Dad made affected

my sister where she would use the term “family crises” to describe such moments later on in life. I didn’t take it too hard because I didn’t like going to the Garland public school and felt a sense of new adventure and relief, but there was also a bit of anxiety due to the instability and uncertainty. My father drove to Comanche, Texas at night going through the Mix Master interchange in Downtown Dallas, down I30 in Arlington, passing downtown Fort Worth onto Camp Bowie boulevard where we got on Highway 377 heading toward Comanche, Texas passing through the countryside and small towns as before when we left Comanche to move to Dallas. This was a route that would become familiar as an adult when I was old enough to drive visiting my Grandparents. The excitement of going back to Comanche and viewing the city lights at night turned into sleep as I was woken up once arriving in Comanche. My grandfather was surprised and not too pleased from how the last time my father packed up and left, he quickly made the decision that we should go back to Garland and he would help out with the rent because we were already attending school. I forget how the air was cleared between my father and Grandfather but my Grandparents were also happy to see us again. I think my Grandfather was also pleased that in a way things did not work out for my Dad and we were forced back into

their life although not too happy about financially supporting us. I suppose at the time it did not seem that bad, after all my Dad did find a job at Texas Instruments even though he eventually got fired, maybe he would find a similar job that would last. My Dad describes how in the 1970s he went to a trade school or took a course to learn about semiconductors or circuits, also basic computer programming like learning code but a job in computer programming or office work never happened for him. We turned in that night, the look on my big sister's face as she realized we would be returning the next day after saying emotional goodbyes to her friends in dramatic fashion was one of 'oh crap,' I also had the sinking feeling knowing I would be going back to the Garland public school. My Dad however did not mind as much and was happy he had rent money. The next day we had breakfast and all got back in the car heading down Highway 377 to Fort Worth and then Dallas. After the long drive and arriving back at the house in Garland, we started to get out of the car and there were the neighborhood kids that my sister said goodbye to and they were not looking too pleased as she got out of the car, "I thought you were never going to see us again?" one the girls exclaimed in a sarcastic voice. My big sister said "I know, I know..." continuing to have a conversation with them but this time she was more subdued and humbled. I

was surprised by the mean demeanor of the neighborhood girls but I supposed kids can be cruel. I quickly went inside trying to escape the embarrassment and also feeling anxious knowing the next day I would have to go back to school. I forgot what job my Dad eventually got moving back to Garland but life quickly returned to normal. In school, even at that age, I was always a loner and could never break the ice or make many friends, mostly staying quiet, not trying to draw attention to myself. The school day would start off with me anticipating when a class was over and returning home. One day the teacher showed a nature video and part of the video talked about turtles, part of the video showed a turtle's head and neck. I sat there quietly thinking the turtles looked like me, looking around hoping nobody else would notice. I had an overbite and resembled the turtles in the educational nature video with my neck and round face. One of the class clowns started staring at me and the video and then blurred out, "It's Stephen!" pointing at the turtles in the nature video, all the kids in the class started laughing, it seemed the laughs went on forever. I think I tried to respond but my voice was drowned out by laughter. I remember going to music class where the music teacher played on a xylophone and had the class sing the Do Re Me scale. I also remember when a tornado hit the school. The

school alarm sounded while I was in class and all the classrooms exited to the hallway where we were instructed to duck down and cover our heads with our arms. I remember hearing turbulence outside like the rushing of the wind but nothing too dramatic. When the tornado passed we were let out early that day and I recall seeing a boat on top of a house that was near the school and some downed power lines. Part of the school cafeteria was damaged and I remember watching the TV coverage back home with a sense of excitement. At Christmas we went to our grandparents house in Comanche and my grandfather had a surprise. He took us to the side of the house where there was a lone shed and out came a pair of retro 1970s bicycles with curved handle bars. Something that would be considered cool today but it was the 1980s and BMX style bicycles were popular with boys my age. I tried to pretend I was happy and surprised but felt embarrassed by the bicycles. It was no big deal I thought since my grandparents lived in the country and I could ride the 1970s bicycles around their house, no one would see me. My grandfather drove us up Highway 16 in his old Chevy pickup truck to Lake Proctor where there was a paved asphalt street near the lake that looped around so we could ride the retro bikes. There was a nice view of the lake and I could hear the waves hit the rocks on the shore and smell the lake

water. He got the bicycles out of the pickup truck and we took turns taking a spin on the bicycles, or fighting over who would go next taking them for a test drive riding back and forth around the loop. I thought to myself this bicycle isn't that bad, it rides good. My sisters didn't mind the bicycles appearance at all, the style very much suited a lady's bike. Then as we were ready to head back to Garland my grandfather wanted us to take the bikes to my big sister's delight. I told him it was okay to leave them there but my big sister would hear none of it. When we returned home to Garland the bicycles were taken out of the trunk of the car by my Dad and I looked around to see if other kids could see us. I wasn't too eager to ride my retro bike around the neighborhood but what I didn't know was that what I considered embarrassing looked good to someone else. Days went by and my big Sister asked me why I wasn't riding my bicycle. So one day I got out the bike and took a stroll around the neighborhood with my sister and thought this is not too bad, after all my friend Dusty moved away, who cares what people think. Then the retro bicycle didn't seem that embarrassing. The two black kids from my school who would try to beat me up when walking home saw me on the bike. We became comfortable enough on the bike that I would take it to school along with my big sister riding her bike. At school one of the

black bullies that tried to beat me up after school came up to me and said he wanted my bike or he would beat me up if I didn't give it to him. I told him no it was my bike and they could not have it. When school was getting out I looked around for the bullies and when the coast was clear I made my way home on the bike and as I got closer to my house, I was ambushed by the two bullies who were ready to confront me over the bike. I was close to my house and my Dad was in the driveway working on his car. I thought I was in luck and my Dad would come to the rescue. The two black kids walked closely behind me as I approached my Dad and instead of accusing them of anything I told my Dad that the two black kids wanted my bicycle hoping he would read between the lines. My Dad paused and looked at me with a sarcastic expression on his face and asked me did I want to give them my bicycle? I turned and stared at the two black kids who were silent and I said yes and gave them the bike, they grabbed the bike, turned and walked away slowly walking off with the bike in hand. I felt dejected and had a sinking feeling in my stomach not knowing why my Dad would not stick up for me, he went back to working on his car. Later in life I learned that my Dad gave us a certain amount of freedom to learn how to fend for ourselves. Some time passed and one day I saw what the two black bullies did with my bicycle.

They turned it into a tricked out lowrider bike by turning the frame upside down and putting on custom wheels. That style of bike that I initially found retro and embarrassing was appealing to them to make a ghetto bicycle. My sister saw what they did to the bike and thought it was funny, she ran to me and said, "did you see what they did to your bike?" while laughing. Summer break at school was approaching and my Dad was planning to move and rent another house across the street. He had been working on a junked car to remove the car engine. He was planning to weld a frame of a flying saucer and put a V8 car engine inside that would turn propellers or a makeshift fan for lift. Most may think a man trying to build a flying saucer in his garage is a bit unusual but the concept wasn't that new. Man-made flying saucers or VTOL craft were tried by others like the Moller Skycar or the Air Force's failed AVRO vehicle during the 1960s. In fact the human fascination with flight pre-dates the Wright Brothers going as far back as the European Renaissance to inventors like Leonardo da Vinci. My Dad thought his man-made flying design was better than others and would fly - once built that is. I forget if we were evicted or my Dad was told to move but my Dad found another house to rent across the street not far away, here came a frame of a junked car with a loud V8 engine making lots of noise because there was no

muffler, driving down the alley way and across the street to the new rental house that we were moving into with Dad smiling behind the steering wheel. I was afraid all the loud ruckus would draw the attention of the police, but it only drew the attention of some of the neighbors. My sister's neighbor friends ran with the car where my Dad parked it in the garage of the new rental house. In the coming weeks he started welding the frame of the flying saucer using sheet metal or scrap metal that he could find in dumpsters from dumpster diving in industrial parks. The saucer started to take shape looking like a ring with a vertical frame holding it together. I thought things were looking good and my Dad may actually complete it. Then one day here came Dusty to visit out of nowhere. He was riding a BMX dirt bike and skidded the bike sideways in a yard jumping off. I was surprised by Dusty's sudden appearance. He said I told you I would get a Mongoose bike. I looked at his bike with admiration. Dusty noticed we moved across the street and could see me in the yard so I wasn't hard to find. My Dad was in the back yard as I showed Dusty the progress on his saucer. Dusty was polite and seemed impressed but was more interested in showing off his bike. After a short time Dusty said he had to go and rode off on his bike and that's the last time I saw Dusty. When it seemed things were coming together my Dad decided to scrap his saucer.

I was bewildered, why would he scrap his saucer after so much progress? I can't recall if he ever tried lifting the V8 car engine inside the frame but the frame of the saucer was dumped in a field to the south of our neighborhood where people would dump junk - I guess not wanting to pay to dispose of it in a landfill. I remember going to the field sometime later where my Dad dumped the saucer frame along with a neighbor friend that would come around when Dusty was there and the frame of my Dad's flying saucer was still there, stomped on by other kids in the neighborhood and barely recognizable. There were some thrown out clothes and I found a \$20 bill going through some pants pockets saying, "whoa there was money in those pants!" and the neighbor-friend was surprised and wanted to find some money too but that's all we found. I could see myself going to the Stop N' Go filling station where I remember the Atari Galaga theme was always playing from a coin operated arcade machine and buying candy. When I got home I told my Dad and he asked for the money, he was broke and needed it for gas.

My Dad's Religious Side

The inventor side of my Dad where he wanted to build a man-made flying saucer in the garage or back yard was his fun side but he had another side, a more serious side -

that was religion. His religious phases often made him moody. There was no joking around with my Dad over religion and we were often forced to go to the Catholic Church. Religion would often interfere with my Dad's inventor side as his interest in building a flying saucer would subside and he would focus on his religious convictions. My mom and Dad would yell at each other about their religious differences, also political differences while he drove down the road with the windows down since he always drove a junker used car with no air conditioning. Around that time like my big sister attending communion in Italy I had to go to my first Communion. He started attending a Catholic Church in Garland where every Sunday I took a class with other kids my age preparing me for the Communion ceremony. The day arrived for communion and all the children participating in the communion ceremony had to wear dress shoes, black pants, and a button white shirt. My Mom tried her best to dress me after buying clothes from Goodwill. I remember we all had to walk in a straight line down the aisle toward the priest standing in front of the altar to give Communion. It was standing room only with people attending mass and parents seated in benches to watch the ceremony. I walked in a straight line carefully placing one foot in front of the other as we were instructed

trying not to trip, walking behind other kids my age toward the priest offering sacramental bread and after communion and mass had ended that was it. My Dad and my sisters thought I did well. This was not the same communion my sister had attended in Italy where Jordan almonds were handed out and a kid wore their communion clothing knocking on doors to receive money.

Although my father made us go to the Catholic Church I never became an altar boy nor experienced child sex abuse at the hands of a priest. Maybe it's because of that reason, I was never that close to a priest. My Dad would force us to go to church when he felt like going and we mostly stood in the back of the church which was like a test of endurance on how long we could stand. Mass was usually crowded or standing room only. Trying not to laugh uncontrollably if I saw something funny or one of my sisters said something when we were supposed to stay quiet was also a challenge. At my public school the school year was coming to an end and the summer break was approaching. In PE class students had to choose a person to be part of a team and I knew since I didn't have many friends I would be the last one chosen and sure enough it was down from a crowd to two students with me being the last one chosen with all the other students looking at me with pity. I walked home from school with my big sister and she saw two of

our cats that ran off and were now living at another person's house. She kneeled down and started crying, petting them, telling the cats how much she missed them. I roughed up the cats where they lost their whiskers playing with them in the backyard like they were dogs and I remember the cats letting out meows of anger and walking away in the alley. Watching the cats walk away and never coming back made me feel sad and remorseful. Was it because of the peer pressure in school or a boy like me needed a dog? My grandfather's English bulldog didn't mind a bit of rough play. My grandfather would tell me not to get too rough or it would make the dog mean. My big sister scolded me on how I forced the cats to run away as we continued to walk home.

We Moved To Lake Ray Hubbard

My Dad decided to move again. It was because of employment reasons, this time to Lake Ray Hubbard near Wylie, Texas that was around 30 miles northeast from Garland. My recollection is vague when we moved, if it was during the school year but I think it was when school had ended during the summer break. My Dad found a rental house in a lakeside neighborhood that was mostly older wooden houses and some trailers. The lake was a 15 minute walk from the lakeside neighborhood. I remember there was a paved

street close to the lake where people could dock a boat. The Dallas-Fort Worth area isn't close to the ocean but has many man-made freshwater lakes that are popular with the locals for fishing, boating, and water skiing, especially during the summer months. Part of my Dad's adopted childhood in America was spent at Lake Texoma near Sherman, Texas so he was familiar with lakes. The house we rented was a small white wooden house with siding or what is called a stick building. In North Texas there were two types of houses in the suburbs, the older stick buildings made out of wood and the mason buildings or newer brick homes usually in suburban sprawl. The stick buildings were usually less modern. There were some older wood structure large houses like a Victorian house that my Mom was fond of like the Garvey-Viehl-Kelley house on Samuels Avenue in Fort Worth, Texas that my parents once lived in and now is a historical marker. It was a time when they were a young married couple and paid cheap rent. My Mom says they lived there until my Dad got arrested for protesting pornography during the 1970s sexual revolution. In Texas there were also trailers or mobile home parks in more rural areas. These had a reputation for being white trash. The house my Dad was renting at Lake Ray Hubbard wasn't as big as the house we came from in Garland and the types of homes in the lakeside community varied. As we

moved into the house my sisters quickly made friends with neighbor kids across the street. I eventually made friends with a kid younger than me down the road. I remember when first moving there my Dad drove us around to explore the area. I remember standing on large rocks near the lake shore as waves came in. The lakeside neighborhood we moved to was a little more out of the way than Garland, you'd had to drive down a highway past cotton fields. We would now be going to school in Wylie, Texas which would mean walking to a bus stop early in the morning and taking a bus. It didn't seem long after we moved in that my Dad tried building onto the small house going as far as adding on a porch structure and the frame of a room but it ended up not being completed. His rationale was he had a right to build an extra room to accommodate his large family and would say I needed to be kept separate from the girls. My big sister and little sisters would listen to the radio in the small room they would share and practice drawing. I remember hearing the song *I Wanna Be A Cowboy* by Boys Don't Cry and a-ha - *Take On Me* played on the radio. My big sister had a character she would draw called 'Eric Paris' with 80s clothing outfits and big 80s hair. Her style was very much Anime partly due to our childhood spent in Italy where there were more Anime type cartoons. My sisters in their room would also fight over girls' panties and

clothing. One day we were playing with the neighbor kids across the street and one of the boys found a cigarette lighter and was trying to catch things on fire. My big sister saw this and alerted his parents. A mid aged neighbor woman and my big sister both scolded him over playing with fire and how it could burn a house down and made him repeat that he would never play with fire again. The boy I made friends with down the road at first seemed nice. We would climb and sit on the limbs of a pear tree in his yard and talk. He seemed a little mentally challenged and liked gore describing scenes from horror movies to the point it became off-putting or redundant and I wanted to leave. Then his fascination with horror was directed at me, what if he cut me with an ax or knife, or shot me with a gun. I would do my best to play down his threats or laugh it off. One day he invited me to watch a movie at his house and his parents were there. He sat next to me on the floor and made motions with his hand that he wanted to touch my private area, I kept saying no and slapped his hand away. All the while his father sat back in a chair watching from behind and said nothing with a facial expression that he liked what his boy was doing, finally his mother told him to stop. I bailed after that and said I had to leave and go home, coming up with some excuse to leave and made a brisk exit. I never returned to play with the boy after that. One

day my Mother said his mom contacted her and asked what happened to me and that she wanted me to come over and play with her son again because he did not have any friends. I told my Mom I may go see him but never did. I knew there could have been abuse or sexual abuse with that family but it was nothing I could prove and didn't really like going over there to play with him.

Another memory I had while living at Lake Ray Hubbard was once I went to the lake by myself and it was starting to get late as the sun was setting and become dark. I knew it was not a good idea because I was by myself and it would be dark soon but I went to the lake anyway. I was standing near the lake shore watching the waves come in and a car could be seen slowly driving like on the prowl and slowed to a stop like the person driving spotted me. A man driving the car rolled his window down and made a gesture with his finger for me to come to his car. I instinctively knew something wasn't right and luckily the car was far enough away that I could make a run for it. I started running as fast as I could, overcome by fear and adrenaline, it felt like everything was moving in slow motion. When I started to reach the lakeside neighborhood I looked back and the car was gone. By this time it was dark and I walked at a fast pace after being gassed from running so hard and there were dogs barking in a yard, I stopped to pick up a rock and

something told me it was not a good idea to throw it but I threw it anyway and heard a window break, I started running again as fast as I could hoping no one saw me and finally reached home feeling panicky and nervous. I was hoping there would not be a knock on the door because of the shattered window but it was late enough that no one saw me. My conscience told me that maybe I should tell my parents but I knew that they were broke and I would be in real trouble so I stayed silent. One day I was walking past a house in the lakeside neighborhood that had tall weeds, it was near where the mentally challenged kid lived. Two men working on their truck saw me and said they would give me \$25 to mow their lawn. They said I could use their lawn mower. I agreed and became excited. I assured them that I was up to the task. Here was a chance to actually make money and I was just a kid. I started to become cocky thinking that I could start working mowing lawns on a regular basis thinking of all the money I could make. I started mowing the lawn tackling the tall weeds breaking out in a sweat when the lawn mower sputtered out and stopped. It was out of gas. I ran to my Dad and told him what had happened and that I needed more gas. He stared at me and asked what are you going to do? I told him I needed to get more gas but had no money and he said no. I was both angered and disappointed leaving the

lawn mower stuck in the grass. I was too shy or embarrassed to go talk to the men about needing more gas. Like with the bullies in Garland taking my bike my father did not want to help. Maybe he wanted me to learn to not only stick up for myself but learn how to negotiate and bargain like cutting him in on the action for help getting gas. I just did not figure it out at the time and the thoughts of making extra money faded. My Dad after moving to Lake Ray Hubbard near Wylie, Texas still continued to have employment problems and was struggling financially. Asking my grandparents for help wasn't always an option. He would bring me along with him and drive around looking for beer cans on the side of the highway and prowl industrial parks usually on the weekend when nobody was there which gave him the opportunity to dumpster dive. My Dad had a particular affection for junk, especially the type of junk thrown in dumpsters at Industrial Parks like electronics, scrap metal, and aluminum cans. The smell of methane and dot matrix computer paper, old beer dripping from beer cans from dumpster diving is still fresh in my mind. In Wylie we walked up and down the side of the highway holding black trash bags near the lake looking for beer cans but there were not very many cans. We passed by some trailers with pickup trucks in the driveway out came barking a large Rottweiler that gave me

chills. I would look around hoping that people in cars driving past us wouldn't recognize me. I remember stopping in a small convenience store and bait shop with my Dad to get something to drink since it was hot. There was also a wild animal sanctuary in the area that had lions and other exotic animals. That summer my big sister wanted a cat and I went with my Mom and sisters to the Humane Society animal shelter in Wylie. We watched cats that were in a room, one cat that was a blue cream tortoiseshell kitten walked up to the glass window and my big sister pointed at the cat behind the glass and said she wanted that one. We took it home and my sister called it Puter. It seemed like that cat stayed in our family forever, even surviving a house fire, and became a favorite of my Mom. When summer was coming to end it was time to enroll in school. Our parents took us to the school in Wylie to enroll and of course I had butterflies and apprehension about going back to school. For one we were poor and I was shy around other students. Before school started our grandparents would help us out buying school clothes and school supplies.

Our Grandparents Help Out Buying School Clothes

When it was time to visit our grandparents in Comanche our Dad either drove us there as a

family in his car or we would meet my grandparents at a rendezvous point driving halfway so my grandparents did not have to drive in city traffic. We would always meet up at a Denny's parking lot on Camp Bowie boulevard in Benbrook, Texas that was on the western edge of Fort Worth. My Grandparents would drive their 1984 Oldsmobile Regency 98 that had enough room to seat all of us kids. Sometimes we would meet at the Denny's with no intention of going back to Comanche with my grandparents but instead it was about my Dad needing money. Sometimes while meeting at the Denny's we would see B-52 bomber planes fly overhead making a low roar because we were near Carswell Air Force Base in Fort Worth. There was also an Air Museum that had salvaged planes off of Highway 377 that was visible from the road as you would approach Granbury, Texas. I remember my father would sometimes stop there to look at the planes when he would drive us to Comanche since he was interested in aviation, or more specifically building a man-made flying saucer. After arriving in Comanche with my grandparents we would spend some time there and then our grandparents would take us on a day trip to the shopping mall in Brownwood, Texas. We would go to a department store in the mall like JCPenney or Dillards. I remember when my sisters were looking for clothes I saw the

very 1980s striped Jordache jeans. My grandfather would take me to the boys section and would always want to buy me the cheapest blue jeans that were dark blue and starchy made for ranchers and people who wore cowboy boots. I was petrified in wearing them to the point of almost crying, I knew the other students would make fun of me. He had me try them on in the dressing room and I looked like a hillbilly but my grandfather seemed impressed on how they looked on me. I looked in the mirror the only thing missing was suspenders and a straw hat. Once my grandfather bought me the jeans because I didn't have the heart to say no and after our parents took us home I hid them in a drawer. Back then fellow students made fun of you if you wore straight leg pants claiming you were wearing bell bottoms that were very out of fashion in the 1980s. After hiding the pants I felt so guilty afterwards, like I just ripped out my grandfather's heart. My Mom would also take us to Goodwill to find clothes and I was embarrassed to go inside thinking someone my age may see me. Unlike the coolness of Thrift Store today Goodwill was made fun of by other students in school. It implied you were poor and nobody wanted to be viewed as poor. Both my grandparents and my parents would say, "you're there to learn, it's not a fashion show." The school year started and we all got up early to walk to the bus

stop by the side of the highway. There were other kids inside and the bus bumped along the highway making regular stops as I stared out the window looking at the cotton fields. It's strange how I remember some student names and not others. I remember there was one student who was named after the country singer Hoyt Axton. He was a tall red head with a sense of humor and always seemed friendly. The one memory that comes to mind while going to school living at Lake Ray Hubbard was having to participate in a classroom play singing the song Buffalo Gals and then putting on a performance for the parents. I remember the stage was connected to the school cafeteria that could accommodate seating. We practiced under instructions of the teacher until the night of the performance came. Our parents were instructed that we should dress formally and not in casual clothing. My Mom dressed me as best she could. I was apprehensive if my parents could find the right clothing. The night of the performance came and it reminded me of a PTA meeting. There was fruit punch in plastic cups and oatmeal cookies for the parents and I remember standing on stage singing, "Buffalo gals why don't you come out tonight, come out tonight, come out tonight...and dance to the light of the moon." After the performance my parents and sisters said I was good and my parents drove back to the lakeside neighborhood at

night. The weather was getting colder, it was fall, and on the weekend I met some boys who lived further away from our house in the same lakeside neighborhood. One was approaching his teenage years and was an outdoors type, like my friend Dusty in Garland he wore army pants, the other kid was around my age. We went to the lake where there were park benches and the teenaged boy told the story of how he climbed a tree over some park benches and tables watching a couple drink beer and have sex on the table and they did not spot him. Then we went to a house with lots of trees that belonged to one of the boy's relatives and we were going to play war games. One of us would pretend to be an enemy soldier and go hide to be hunted down. It wasn't much of a game, I went to hide and the two neighborhood boys started arguing and then one had the idea to pop some fireworks like they were explosions, all the while I was becoming more fearful playing with them boys, one showed a large pocket knife and started cutting down tree limbs, the younger kid tried to light some fireworks where someone had a campfire and he lit a fire and got the campfire burning again with the sound of bullets popping and shooting around. Apparently someone left some bullets there and the fire was shooting them around. We hid behind a tree while there were loud pops from the bullets followed by

zeuw.. type sounds from the bullets shooting in all directions. All the while a dog that was on the property was running around the fire, excited, and barking. The older boy scolded the younger kid and then started to laugh while dunking their heads. They were commenting how the dog did not care and was running around barking to the sound of the bullets. I wasn't laughing and stayed silent in mortal fear, what if one of the bullets struck me in the face or head? The little bonfire started to subside and so did the sound of the bullets popping. The fire didn't look like it was going to spread since someone had already made a campfire pit there. We quickly ran away and started to make our way back home walking near the lake. I didn't see the teenage boy or his friend very often, mostly because they did not live near my house. I believe one of them asked me why I didn't come around more often and I remembered our adventure with the bullets shooting everywhere and the large pocket knife and decided not to.

My Dad Temporarily Returns To Italy

My Dad had a love-hate relationship with America and his native country. He was thinking about going back to Italy again from having employment struggles in America. His plan was to get a job in Italy and move us there once he saved up enough money and

got settled. In Texas it was real easy to get fired from a job. I remember liking the idea because I liked living in Italy better. I forget when exactly my Dad left but my Mom struggled to provide for us by herself. She had a mental handicap even though she claimed recovering from her brain operation before we were born was a miracle and she was perfectly healed by Jesus. Her diagnosis after the surgery to take care of her seizures was not good so her recovery really was a bit of a miracle but she was still not the same person afterwards. She would stutter and had a hard time articulating under pressure so like my Dad she had a hard time holding down a job, it was usually menial or fast food type employment, but my Mom was determined to be independent and hold her own. My grandparents tried to see if she could make it on her own but the rent was not paid. I remember there was a Christian family that she met at her Evangelical church that let us stay at their house. Unlike my Dad who was Catholic my Mom liked evangelical Christianity and the family she met said they helped people out from time to time. I remember the family had a large house with a big backyard. They had a tall son who was in high school and other siblings, I forget how many but I do remember it was a large family like The Brady Bunch. The parents limited how much TV their children could watch and I remember going into one of the

children's rooms where they had board games they would play for fun and very little toys. Their children were well behaved, didn't even curse or use foul language but I could tell they were annoyed we were around. In the morning they would all wake up to go to school and catch the bus. I remember their Mom making peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and putting one sandwich sliced in half in a paper bag. There may have also been an apple or a small bag of chips included but I remember it did not seem like a lot to me. The teenager in the family seemed really thin and none of the children were fat. He was very respectable to his parents, he thanked his Mom, grabbed his sack lunch and ran out the door to catch the bus. Since he was older he took a different school bus. I remember it felt weird going to school while sharing a home with another family. It didn't really help my anxiety in going to school. Our time with this family was short lived. I think my Grandparents stepped in and agreed to continue paying rent at the lakeside house. My mother struggled to live in the area because it was more rural than Garland. I remember she drove down a winding narrow two lane highway and it especially became difficult at night since she had to wear glasses. She took this route because it was a type of short cut from her church and she did not have to drive as fast as on the main highway. It

wasn't unusual for other cars to speed or try to go around us. One day the worst happened, a car came speeding around the corner and rammed right into us head on - totaling the beat up used car my mom drove. My mom had to go to the hospital, I forget exactly what type of injury she had, maybe a cracked rib or a broken arm, I remember she also bit into her lip, my sister sitting in the front banged her head pretty hard. I was jolted in the back seat all the while seeing the accident as it happened since I was staring at the cars coming at us in fear of my mother's nervous driving. My Grandparents drove all the way from Comanche to the hospital and I forget how long it took for her to recover but they bought her another used car. I remember after the car accident I was too afraid to get in the car with my Mom while she was driving and would flinch every time a car passed us on the highway thinking another accident would happen. It was eventually decided that the house near Lake Ray Hubbard was too rural for my Mom and since we were still in school my grandparents decided to rent a house in the city of Wylie, Texas.

We Moved To Wylie, Texas and Making Neighborhood Friends

The house in Wylie was a small wooden house located on the corner of Masters

Avenue and 4th Street. It was up the street from a graveyard and mortuary. Down the street there was a grocery store and filling station near Highway 78. It was similar to Garland, Texas because it was a big neighborhood that was near other neighborhoods. The school was not close but still walking distance, a lot closer than the lakeside neighborhood at Lake Ray Hubbard. We would be going to the same school so the only thing that changed was where we lived. I consider my time living in Wylie to be the last childhood years before adolescence kicked in and even though we did not live there long, only a few years, it seemed like time went on forever very much like my time living in Italy. Like the house rentals my Dad would move us into moving into the house in Wylie gave me a feeling of anxiety because of the uncertainties and what was in store for me living there. The floor inside the house was lopsided when standing in the living room and some doors were trimmed at a slight angle in order to close. Many houses in Texas, especially older houses, have foundation problems and this house was no exception. The house had a backyard, there was a back screen door with cement steps leading from the house to the backyard. The backyard also had a small tornado shelter and it was bordered from the alley and next door neighbor by a fence. I noticed a boy around my age standing and staring across

the street from the front yard and recognized him from my school. He said his name was Shane and said he saw me at school and I told him I also recognized him. The house across the street was his grandparents house and he spent a lot of time there. Shane's parents' house was a newer brick home in an adjacent neighborhood closer to the school. Shane was more middle class than my family and we were of course poor so I wasn't sure he was eager to be friends or playmates. As time went on we became good friends but Shane was more distant at school and hung round the more popular kids. He even explained that because I was unpopular he couldn't hang around me at school and I understood and said it was okay. I won't lie, I was a little offended but knew it was true because of my shyness. I wasn't the most unpopular person in school, that would have been Will Oxley who once showed up to school smelling like fish from treading in a creek or pond before school looking for catfish and then screaming and fighting with his Dad in the hallway covered in mud, I forgot the details but all the school kids were laughing and talking about it afterward. Will's family was a bit backwoods or hillbilly by Texas standards and poor like my family. Will Oxley looked a lot like former President George W. Bush and he may have been a bit slow, however he appears to be doing well in adult life. I saw him on social media and he's

an auto mechanic with a normal family living not far from Wylie. There was another kid in the neighborhood who lived down the street behind Shane Kramer, he looked like a child version of reality TV show survivalist Bear Grylls and he was a very outdoors type person. His father would religiously watch Marty Stouffer's *Wild America*, a nature program that aired on PBS (public broadcasting) and I guess that rubbed off on him. I remember the kids father had a VCR and would record *Wild America* episodes and they would always be playing when we would enter the house. There was either a recliner or a couch in the living room with animal skin and stuffed animals or taxidermy on the wall. His house was an older wooden-stick home like the one we rented but I believe they owned their house and lived there for a while. All three of us would get into adventures especially around the summertime. Shane would usually visit on the weekend by coming by my house or knocking on the door. Around that time I was into Transformers, the robot action figure toys and also watched the animated cartoon on TV and so did Shane. I once went over to Shane's parents house and he had a wide assortment of toy action figures, a black light, and a trampoline in his backyard. I remember the visit to his house was a bit awkward since it wasn't a place I went very often and it was a neat tidy room. Different

from how my family lived in a messy house. His parents would have been considered normal or cool by 1980s standards. I remember his Mom who was still young, maybe in her twenties driving us in her Ferrari and playing *Walk Like An Egyptian* by the Bangles on the car radio. She was taking Shane back to his Grandparents to drop him off there and I went with them. I think Shane's grandparents were like daycare for his young parents who enjoyed their freedom so that's why I saw Shane so often. Shane, the outdoors kid near his house, and myself eventually all got bicycles and we started exploring the neighborhood. I have a memory of wandering on the railroad tracks in a remote area, we must have traveled miles on our bikes, we came across an abandoned dilapidated house and there was a water well, Shane and the neighbor kid were looking down in the well and claimed to have seen a human hand like it was severed or a body was down there. I couldn't see anything and would ask, "where? where?" thinking they may be pulling my chain but they seemed serious and insisted that they could see a hand, it was getting late and we were losing light so it started to feel creepy, and a bit scary if there was a real human body part down the well, we hurried and walked down the railroad tracks and got on our bikes and went home. Another memory with Shane was going down Masters Avenue to the local

convenience store, there was an arcade machine that had the video game PaperBoy. Shane was pretty good at playing PaperBoy, the video game character would ride a bicycle throwing newspapers at houses dodging obstacles and earning points. We would buy Now and Later candy and chew it on the way home.

Wylie, Texas - Space Shuttle Challenger Disaster & A Tragic Fire

On Masters Avenue there was also a small park. I remember going to the park after the Space Shuttle Challenger disaster. At school there was an announcement by the school principal that the space shuttle blew up and we were let out of school early. The school teacher talked to the class about it like it was a tragic event. The Challenger received a lot of publicity because one of the astronauts was a school teacher. I went to the small park with my sister's and remembered the song *Sara* by Jefferson Starship and *Brass Monkey* by the Beastie Boys was popular at that time. One of the things I used to love to do at the park was swing real high on one of the swings and right when the swing swung back down to ground level and started going forward I would hop off pushing my right foot to the ground and my body would thrust forward in the air like I was a long jumper by using the swing's centrifugal force to propel

myself. Another thing I would do at the park is lay down on the merry-go-round and spin the merry-go-round real fast using my foot and make myself very dizzy where when I would walk off I had trouble walking forward and would also feel nauseous. My big sister had an unpleasant encounter with a teenage bully at the park. He had a round face with pockmarks and taunted her yelling "Esther Molester" over and over again until she started crying and ran home. After that we did not visit the park that much but my big sister made friends with some girls that lived near the park on Masters Avenue and tragically one night their house burned down killing all inside. It was a big family that lived there and the fire made the news. My sister was taken aback after hearing the news and we all ran down to the burned down house the following morning. There was police tape around the yard and what was left of the house after the fire. My sister shouted, "no..., no" and started weeping. We stood there silent for a while showing our respect to the neighbor friends she made that were now deceased. It was strange to see them one day and the next day no one was there but the burned down remains of a house. Some criminal neighbors would later move next to us and become convicted of arson but I don't think this was related, I forget what the cause of the fire was, maybe a heater in a room. With my Mom being alone in Wylie and

with my Dad gone, food wasn't always easy to come by. At school we qualified for free lunch or didn't, it depended on the circumstances like if my family applied or if I was new and didn't yet qualify, the free lunch program is something I had growing up but it was off and on, it was a food supplemental program designed for low income families. The free lunch card that students brought with them when going to the school cafeteria could be a source of embarrassment. I have one unpleasant memory of bringing canned peaches in a glass jar and eating it alone in the lunchroom with students staring at me. I wasn't on the free lunch program at this time and my Mom didn't have any food at home except a can of peaches. I couldn't decide whether I should finish eating it out of embarrassment because I noticed other students were staring. One student was a big kid who was considered one of the more popular students and he was someone Shane knew. He was not big like a fat person but had a wide set body like a football lineman. He was from a medium class family closer to where Shane's parents lived and gave me a disgusted stare as I was eating the jar of peaches. One day he came up to me at lunch when I was sitting alone like I always did and said I would be popular if I got rid of the moles on my face and a protruding one on the back of my neck. Kids can be cruel at times because of the lack of maturity but also

brutally honest. I too could see my physical imperfections staring into a mirror but there was nothing I could do about it. I thought to myself being unpopular is not necessarily a bad thing thinking of the pressure of being popular and having to hang around the popular kids. Once I went with Shane to the big kid's house, it was a nicer brick house and in his bedroom I remember seeing a heavy metal band poster, I forgot which band maybe KISS and it seemed like the room of a normal medium class boy as depicted on TV. His bed was made by his mom and the room was well organized. It was similar to when I saw Shane's room in his parents house. My family by contrast were more like Gypsies, a messy house and my bed never made. We kind of all did our own thing in my family except my Mom did prepare meals and do things like laundry. Once Shane came inside my house and was a bit shocked how messy it was but he didn't seem unimpressed, he said he envied my family's freedom and that his parents would not allow him to live like we did. I started to also enjoy the freedom too with only my Mom there and my Dad away, and felt more settled living in the house on Masters Avenue and then one day my Dad came walking through the door much to my surprise and shock. He was back from Italy and looked more European wearing a leather jacket. He said he was tired from his long flight from Italy. He rubbed my head and

handed me an unwrapped present, it was a big toy bulldozer truck. I acted happy and pretended to play with it pushing the toy truck around on the floor even though I was now into Transformers toys. He seemed unfazed and asked where my Mom was and I told him in the bedroom where he proceeded to enter and closed the door. I heard a yell of surprise from my Mom and then the room was quiet, my Dad was tired from his flight and was asleep. I felt anxious with a million thoughts going through my mind, what was going to happen with my father back living with us? My Dad claimed after he returned to Italy he got a union job as a welder, partly due to learning to weld trying to build a flying saucer in the USA, and he wrote my Mom letters urging her to fly back to Italy with the family but my Mom wrote back and refused preferring to stay in America because of her previous experience living in Italy. My Dad was not exactly happy to return to America since he was leaving behind a more stable job. My Dad knew how easy it was to get fired in America considering he was not a team player and with his previous employment struggles. My Dad woke up from his rest and seemed to be in a better mood the following day. He took a look at the house and seemed especially impressed with the back yard. It didn't seem long after my Dad returned that I was walking with him again holding a black trash bag looking for beer

cans and going along to dumpster dive in Industrial Parks around Garland and Arlington, Texas. I didn't mind walking around the Industrial Parks so much because I knew the odds of another kid from school seeing me picking up beer cans with my Dad were slim and it also seemed fun like an adventure. I thought Industrial Parks had a certain appeal, like an escape. On the weekends when all warehouse workers were at home Industrial Parks were a tranquil modern landscape of neatly organized warehouse buildings and loading docks that had these huge dumpsters. My Dad, an expert dumpster diver, climbed up the dumpster, taking a look in and quickly retrieving what he could find, then hurrying along. If he found something good of valuable he would quickly grab it and put it in the car and drive off telling me to hurry up and get inside the car. During the 1980s dumpsters in Industrial Parks were full of styrofoam peanuts, and computer printer ink cartridges, and dot matrix computer paper. My Dad was happy to see any metal or electronics that he could salvage. We both knew a patrol car could come by or someone could call the police on us and this did happen to my Dad on occasion. I think that's one reason he took me along with him holding a trash bag picking up cans while looking through dumpsters, if he was alone he may have come across as a prowler trying

to break into a building. When he was desperate for money and we couldn't find many beer cans he would sometimes take me to an aluminum recycling plant near a Coors Beer building in Arlington, Texas that was visible from the freeway near Six Flags theme park. Beer cans would be shredded and loaded onto a train leaving behind piles of shredded aluminum pieces on the railroad track. When the recycling plant was not in operation he would walk fast with me to the railroad tracks holding trash bags and tell me to quickly scoop up the shredded cans and put them in a trash bag. We could only be there in a matter of minutes before rushing off or the odds of being caught increased. Once when I wasn't there he said someone called the police and he was arrested. The police made him lay face down on the ground spreading his arms and legs before handcuffing him. My Dad would also describe a number of police chases as result of his scavenging around Industrial Parks and him being able to get away. My Dad was making himself at home on Masters Avenue in Wylie. He was putting the back yard with tornado shelter to good use compiling stuff he found dumpster diving. The thought of using the backyard to build a flying saucer became very much on his mind. My Dad quickly got over my Mom not wanting to have him fly us back to Italy. Some of the cons of living in Italy were the lack of space, inability to

dumpster dive, and the stricter Italian authorities. My friend across the street saw that my Dad moved back with us and as time went on he saw that my Dad was trying to build something in the backyard and started asking him questions. My Dad in a serious manner started to talk about building a flying saucer and describing how it would work. Unlike my old friend Dusty in Garland who was humbled, Shane would walk away with me snickering thinking my Dad was crazy. He promised to not tell the other students at school so I wouldn't get teased or be made fun of.

Visiting My Dad's Foster Parents Peggy & Bill in Sherman Texas

We didn't see my Dad's foster parents as often as my Mother's parents in Comanche. They lived at Lake Texoma, close to Sherman, Texas where my Dad spent most of his adopted childhood. They were known as Peggy and Bill Watson. Bill Watson's demeanor and appearance reminded me of former NFL coach Bill Parcells, and Peggy's looked similar to Lucille Ball, she sounded like her too but had a raspy voice from chain smoking and the occasional coughing fit because of her smoking habit. When my Dad was adopted from Italy Peggy was married to another man named Johnny Ciciera who was a guido living in Boston, Massachusetts.

Peggy divorced him, moving to Sherman, Texas. There she eventually married Bill Watson who was a used car salesman. My Dad claims Bill was fooling around with Peggy while he was still married to another woman and my Dad would often joke about the love triangle when we went to visit them. My Dad would later tell me that Peggy and my Mom did not get along and Bill Watson did not particularly like him and my Dad moved out when he turned 18 but that seemed to be water under the bridge. They were both nice probably because we did not visit that often or live near them. They were annoyed that my Dad would sometimes show up unannounced, usually asking for money and lecture him about calling ahead of time to let them know he was coming. I recall they used that excuse once in not giving him money because they did not go to the bank or carried much money on them. The trip to Sherman, Texas was long and used a tank of gas. I'm sure we would have spent more time with his foster parents if we grew up in Sherman. My Dad recalls living in Sherman and a type of mentor of his was one of Peggy's relative's named Buddy Randles who built and repaired stick buildings or wooden houses. He built the house Peggy lived in when she raised my Dad in Sherman. My Dad says they lived on a street named Texas Street in a suburb of Sherman. Peggy still had the house and used it for storage. When

we would come by and visit during the 1980s Bill and Peggy were now living in a house near Lake Texoma in a secluded wooded area close to the lake. I always remember Peggy had a jar of M&M's candy and would throw an M&M at her beagle dog who perked up his ears and eagerly stared at the M&M's jar. Bill would keep glass bottles of 7-Up soda in the fridge. Bill would sit in his recliner with a red face complexion like he had high blood pressure smiling looking up at us being cordial yet sarcastic in his banter. Peggy did most of the talking. She would tell the story of how my Dad while on the high school football team once made a big play after catching the ball and slipped in a puddle of water on the football field while it was raining. Peggy said my Dad also liked eating bean sandwiches and was always hungry as a teenager. She cooked pinto beans and after he returned home from school he would put the beans between two slices of bread. I remember we arrived at their house at Lake Texoma and all got out of the used beat up car my Dad was driving, Peggy saw me walking toward her and turned to Bill and said, "doesn't he remind you of someone?" and said I made a striking resemblance to my Dad when he was my age. Peggy noticed that my big sister was the alpha child in the family who could hold down a conversation and make eye contact. In the yard there was a swing made from a spare tire tied to a rope

that was hanging from a large tree. My sisters and I would take turns swinging on it. There were also large nails inserted into the dirt in the front yard to throw horseshoes. In the backyard there was a net for playing badminton. My Dad saw an old Indian motorcycle and told me to hop on behind him. With my hands firmly around his waist he drove around the backstreets near their house going through the woods and near the lake. Sometimes while visiting Bill and Peggy we would go see the lake where there was a large dam. My Dad said it was built by German prisoners of war during WWII. He said there were also large fish at the bottom of the dam. Our stay at Bill and Peggy's house was always short, we never stayed for more than a day. When it was time to leave, that's when they would hand my Dad some money, Bill Watson would hand him some cash, putting it in his hand, staring at him real close and say, this is what you came here for while smiling in a cynical manner.

Sometimes Peggy would have to remind Bill as we were leaving and getting into the car to give my Dad some parting money and Bill would sarcastically respond, "what money? I don't have any money." My Dad had no guilt in receiving money from Bill and would be in a good mood with a smile on his face as started his way back to Dallas but sometimes Bill and Peggy would not give him money or turn him down if he asked them. I remember

on one such occasion my Dad left empty handed. He only took me along with him and arrived unannounced. On the way back he became angry and told the story of Bill Watson forcing him to cut tall weeds in the backyard with a lawn mower when he was a teenager on a hot dusty day. For a majority of my Dad's adopted life he lived in a single parent home with Peggy after she divorced until Bill Watson came along right before my Dad's high school graduation. Bill may have been trying to instill discipline and hard work ethic by forcing my Dad to cut the tall weeds. He may have also convinced my Dad to join the Army after high school for the same reason. My Dad's stay in the Army was short, partly due to my Mom's neurological disorder or from her suffering from seizures and his unwillingness to fight in the Vietnam War. My Dad tells the story of having to peel potatoes for being a conscientious objector. My big sister was born while he was in the Army stationed in Germany. During the time we lived in Wylie I remember the drive to Sherman, my Dad turned on the car radio and 80s Pop music like Cyndi Lauper and Boy George was playing. On the way there we stopped at a park and my Dad had his photo taken standing in a hollowed out tree holding one of my little sister's. Another memory is we went to visit Bill and Peggy around the holidays and my Dad stopped at a childhood friend's house, she was a girl that was a

neighbor that my Dad befriended as a child. There was an old black and white photo of both of them at Lake Texoma. My Dad decided to stop by and see her while visiting Peggy and he stopped by his childhood friend's house unannounced on Christmas day. She was poor like our family and had two boys. Maybe she was a single parent too or the father was away, I forgot her personal life details. When we arrived they were eating Hamburger Helper potatoes stroganoff and the house smelled like Hamburger Helper. I think they did not have much food. She offered us some in a bowl and a glass of water but we declined. After they ate the eldest kid was annoyed, staring at us with a mean expression wondering why we were there at such an awkward time but she was genuinely happy to see my Dad like she understood his quirks. Each child only had one present to open around the tree and one was just a sweater. We sat quite awkwardly watching them open presents around a lonely tree with very little decoration and decided to leave saying goodbye with our Dad smiling. As we were leaving my big sister scolded my Dad and thought it was embarrassing but my Dad shrugged it off and said she didn't mind.

Wylie, Texas - The Sketchy Next Door
Neighbors Move In

One day some neighbors moved to the house next door to us and were not from Texas, it may have been West Virginia or Missouri. They seemed a bit sketchy or what people in Texas call white trash. A kid with a mullet a little younger than me wanted to play with Shane and myself and described how his parents had scrapes with the law and decided to move to Texas. Shane was skeptical and did not believe him but the summer arrived and school was out. We had more time to play since Shane was over his grandparents house across the street more often. My dad was making progress on building his saucer, much in the same way he tried to build one in Garland, welding the frame with plans to put a V8 car engine inside. One day he decided to go back to the Industrial Park in Arlington, Texas. He discovered there was a way to sneak into the Six Flags theme park that was nearby. We pulled into the Six Flags parking lot and walked toward a wooded area. Part of the theme park went through the wooded area. Apparently my Dad was not the only one to discover how to sneak into Six Flags because a giant boombox or ghetto blaster was placed in a trash bag by some trees as if someone else snuck into the park and hid their boombox there. My Dad rushed me along the woods to a wooden walkway, sometimes a security guard would be standing near the walkway to see if any trespassers were trying

to sneak in but my Dad did not see anyone, the coast was clear, we both came from behind the trees and started walking into Six Flags as if we bought tickets and making our way from ride to ride. It was getting dark and my Dad wanted to go on the parachute ride. We were waiting in line as the parachute ride was descending and my Dad said, "look at those two niggers, you can only see their eyes and teeth " as the parachute ride with two young black men who had a huge smile on their face was coming down. Everyone standing in line was white and started laughing at my Dad's comment and when my Dad saw other people laughing at his jokes he would glance at me and keep laughing. His comment in front of others standing in line made me cringe and I felt embarrassed knowing it was offensive and I couldn't say the n-word at school without getting beat up, especially around other black students. We didn't stay long at Six Flags mostly because my Dad was broke and concessions were expensive so we exited the same way we came in and came across the boombox again in the trash bag, my Dad picked it up, looked around and walked fast out of the wooded area to the parking lot and toward the car. He took out the boombox and pressed the play button on the cassette player and rap music started blaring out of the speakers, he laughed and said it was nigger music and that I could have it. I was happy and excited

to have such a cool boombox but also a little guilty thinking it didn't belong to us. The boombox is something I would have never gotten if we didn't go to Six Flags that day. My Dad left six flags and It was a hot summer night and as my Dad was driving he saw a car pulled over blasting RnB music and laughed and said look at those two niggers making out in the car. My Dad would use the n-word in a joking manner but did not like seeing discrimination or sympathize with the KKK. He later described his own discrimination from being Italian or perceived as a foreigner not born in this country. After cashing in beer cans or scrap metal from dumpster diving my Dad would sometimes go to McDonalds and buy a bunch of cheeseburgers from the dollar menu and wolf them down one by one sharing some with me. Another meal my Dad would buy is hamburger meat, a loaf of bread, fresh jalapeño peppers, and mustard to make homemade hamburgers by frying it in a pan. He would also buy a bag of ice and a two liter bottle od Coca-Cola to wash it down. I guess it was more like a sandwich since he used a loaf of bread. He would also get maraschino cherry ice cream. My big sister would laugh and comment about the fake cherries in the ice cream, I don't think she was fond of maraschino cherry ice cream like my Dad. We returned home from Six Flags and I got to show off my boom box, my big sister was

impressed but that did not last long for the following day it went missing. The culprits became the sketchy family next door and the white trash kid with a mullet. I was so overcome with rage that my Dad had to hold me back on the porch when I saw the mullet kid and some of his family in their front yard. It a bit ironic, my Dad took the boom box from people who snuck into Six Flags and it was taken from me by the thieves next door. There wasn't much else valuable to steal from our house, that was one of the benefits of being poor, who knows what else they would have taken. Weeks went by where I would no longer talk to or play with the mullet kid next door and until one day Shane urged me to reconcile because he was another person to play with and I think Shane was entertained by the kid but as the old saying goes be careful of the company you keep. Stealing was second nature to the mullet kid, he knew where the coke machine vendor hid spare cokes that were from a six pack placed behind the vending machine after refilling them. The mullet kid would reach behind a coke machine and pull out a warm can of coke. Shane and the outdoors kid who lived behind Shane's grandparents house found a great bicycle jumping spot near the grocery store. There was a little hill in an area with trees and a path that went down the hill. We would take our bikes on top of the hill and peddle at full speed hopping as

the path on the hill went down flying through the air a good distance before landing. It was like something you see in BMX dirt bike races and the sensation of flying through the air was a real rush like riding a roller coaster. One day Shane wanted to show me something. At our bike jumping spot near the grocery store was a stash of candy, beverages, and other junk food. The mullet kid was brazenly shoplifting from the grocery store and his influence rubbed off on Shane and the outdoors kid. They took me along to see the mullet kid in action egging him on. He went inside the grocery store and started grabbing stuff, even a two liter bottle of soda that made his shirt bulge walking out of the store past the grocery register through the automatic doors. My jaw dropped in astonishment that he did not get caught because it was very apparent. As the mullet kid exited the grocery store and approached us we all blurred out in laughter in total amazement. The shoplifting continued and Shane, the outdoors kid, and the mullet kid were getting cocky and overconfident saying it was no big deal opening junk food stolen from the store and said I could do it too, then tried to urge me on but I was too afraid. One day I decided to do it, I tried grabbing some candy bars at an empty cashier aisle, looking around first to see if anyone was watching, and walked out of the store. I was elated thinking my friends were right but while

walking was overcome with guilt, the guilt soon faded when I was craving more candy. My poor family didn't have a lot of food and I started thinking our troubles were over, I can just walk into the grocery store grab something and walk out. Like Shane and the outdoors kid I too started to believe it was too easy. My Mom told me I had a letter from my Grandparents, inside was a birthday card with a \$20 bill. I hid it in a dresser drawer remembering the boombox being stolen by the mullet kid or his sketchy family that lived next door. I remembered one of my little sisters said she saw the neighbors looking through the windows when they first moved in and knew if I had anything valuable I would have to hide it. I went back to the grocery store to steal some more in the same grocery aisle near the registers, this time feeling less nervous like it was no big deal, I grabbed some beef jerky and put it under my shirt, then felt a hand on my shoulder, it was store manager who was loud and forceful saying he saw me taking the jerky and to follow him into the manager's office. I was so startled that I was caught that I almost peed in my pants. In the grocery manager's office he said he was going to contact my parents and call the police and asked how many more items I've stolen from the store. Being a bit naive and frightened, I told him about the candy bars and put on my best act, almost crying telling the manager that it was my

birthday, my family was poor, and stealing was something I only recently tried. The store manager could tell I wasn't an experienced shoplifter and then pressed if I was alone or with other kids and I said yes I shoplifted alone not telling him about my friends. He then said he would not tell my parents or call the police if I paid for the beef jerky and candy I stole. The manager tallied up the items and said I owed the store \$20. I remembered the birthday money that my grandfather sent and rushed home to get it out of the dresser drawer and rushed back paying the manager \$20. He then told me to never come back to the grocery store again. I left partly relieved, embarrassed, and ashamed, then became mad walking home. The mullet kid did it to me again I thought, first stealing the boombox, now getting me into shoplifting where I lost my birthday money. Some weeks went by and Shane did not come by to play and then one day I saw Shane at his grandparents house across the street. He seemed quiet and distant, I told him what happened at the grocery store and asked what happened to him. He said they were all caught shoplifting, him, the mullet kid, and the outdoors kid and that the manager called their parents who grounded him. Shane told me the mullet kid said it was me who squealed on them. I then asked what time they were caught and I told Shane it couldn't have been me because I was caught

afterward on my birthday. That was probably why I was caught, the grocery manager was on the lookout for more kids shoplifting. The mullet kid was lying. At first Shane didn't believe me but saw how mad I was at the mullet kid then he started to laugh and agreed to go confront the mullet kid next door to our house. We walked toward my neighbors house and I was fuming, ready to tell the mullet kid off. It was a hot summer day and the mullet kid was sitting down in the dirt next to a gas can and huffing gasoline fumes using a bag to get high. He was groggy, his eyes were watery and bloodshot. The shoplifting didn't seem to matter to him and he could care less what we were saying to him. He wanted us to try, offering his bag in a slow sluggish motion but I declined and so did Shane who was in utter disbelief. I told him huffing gas fumes can destroy his brain cells but the mullet kid didn't seem to care what was happening around him. In school some students were known to sniff glue, glue stick, or Wite-Out to get high.

Wylie, Texas - My Dad Angry at The City and Falsely Arrested

My father back home was writing both the Wylie newspaper and the city Mayor letters. It seemed the city took notice of his collection of scrap metal, junk, and the metal

frame of his flying saucer being built in the yard that was noticeable from the street since we lived on the corner. Many cities have zoning laws against hoarding junk in the yard but to my father it was not junk. He believed he had the right to build what he wanted and also tried using his dual citizenship argument by putting a pole in our front yard and raising the Italian flag. This was of great embarrassment to my big sister who urged him to take it down. My Dad was not new to writing letters that usually took the form of long diatribes as one long run-on sentence. His favorite topic was religion but he would also write letters to academics and politicians about his inventions. I remember my Dad driving me to the local Wylie newspaper with a letter in hand arguing he had the right to keep scrap metal in the yard and build his saucer, I think it may have been closed as he walked back to the car not looking happy. Weeks earlier my Dad was in a jovial mood, he said someone was interested in his flying saucer and wanted to see it. He drove me to school and said we were going to be rich. He was going to drop me off at school in a flying saucer, how would you like that? he said while rubbing my head. My Dad claimed he was in communication with one of Ross Perot's representatives, probably his son who was into aviation but he wouldn't disclose who it was. My Dad said the meeting did not go well, Ross Perot's rep scrutinized

his saucer and my Dad played dumb unwilling to disclose everything. I can only speculate it was because my Dad would tell the story of how his ideas were ripped off. After his initial upbeat excitement I remember my Dad seemed depressed, it was like a missed opportunity. He continued to weld his saucer even though the city of Wylie was on his case. My Dad would tap directly into the power lines and use a bucket of electrified salt water to weld. Sometimes the power was turned off because the electric bill was not paid. One day I went with Shane and the neighbor mullet kid looking for cokes behind vending machines but the vendor caught onto us and stopped putting six packs behind the machines except at one machine that was a grocery store further away from our house. The mullet kid went to an alley and said he needed to take a dump or #2, he pulled down his shorts wearing no underwear and squatted above the ground and started to poop, then he pulled his shorts up without using any toilet paper to wipe himself like it was no big deal. Shane looked where he pooped and to his disbelief there were worms or parasites squirming around in the mullet kid's excrement. Shane told me to look at what he was seeing and I was mortified. This poor kid lived next door and had parasites in his doo-doo. We walked home quietly with the mullet kid pretending nothing was wrong so as not to offend him and parted ways once we

got to the house. I felt queasy walking home and actually felt bad for the mullet kid. It didn't seem like a lot of time passed, maybe a few days or a week that I woke up to a commotion, the white trash family next door house caught on fire and it was put out by the fire department. I walked out of our house to the sight of a fire truck outside and smoke in the air. The mullet kid or his family were nowhere to be seen. After an investigation the house was condemned and torn down leaving only a patch of dirt that turned into a giant puddle of water and mud after it rained. One day I went there to look at the puddle and stuck my hand in the water and noticed a parasite looking like a thin strand of spaghetti burrowing into my skin at a rapid pace, I freaked out and scraped it out of my skin until my arm was bleeding. I ran to the restroom in our house and turned on the faucet with the water running over my arm for a long time, washing the area making sure there were no other wormy parasites on me. I was in fear that maybe that was enough to get me infected and suffer the same fate as the mullet kid inspecting my crap every time I went to use the restroom but to my relief I never saw any parasites. My dad was arrested and thrown in jail shortly after the fire. The fire department noticed he was tapping into the power lines and concluded he must have been the one to spark a fire that burned the neighbors house down. After

a few weeks he was let out of jail after a police investigation determined it was arson and that the neighbors had a sketchy past and were involved in arsons for insurance money or what is called arson fraud. My Dad after being released and vindicated was not too happy. The city was getting on his case about his half built flying saucer calling it junk, what he viewed as the greedy utility company ripping off the poor by turning off the lights, and now a false arrest. I went with Shane and the outdoors kid who lived behind Shane's grandparents house to the hill we would jump on our bikes near the grocery store. We were getting more daring and adventurous with our jumps, picking up speed and trying to jump higher and land further, then tragedy struck. The outdoors kid jumped right after Shane landed but came in for a hard landing, falling off his bike and sliding on his leg in the dirt. Then the outdoors kid started screaming in alarm, it appeared his leg went over a shard of glass and he had a long gash above his knee on the quadriceps exposing fat in the leg to the bone. Shane started cursing and freaked out, I turned away and was afraid to see how bad it was, the outdoor kid thought quickly and said run to my house and call 911. His house was not close but down the street and we could get there in maybe five minutes if we ran fast. Both Shane and I darted off at full sprint like his life depended on it, the outdoor

kid did not stay put, even though his leg had a huge gash he could still move. We didn't bother picking up our bikes, time was of the essence and we were already halfway there running down the street to the outdoor kid's house. Shane noticed the outdoor kid was trailing behind us and turned around to stare at him, he had a look of despair on his face with blood pouring down his leg and visible exposed fat in the leg where the flab moved back and forth with each step, Shane could not help himself, he fell on his knees and started laughing pointing at the outdoor kid running towards us and said look at his face, I got caught up in the moment too and also fell to the ground laughing, we were laughing so hard tears were coming out of our eyes, the outdoor kid became visibly angry and asked what's so funny? running past us eventually arriving at his house where an ambulance eventually arrived. Shane started apologizing, getting over his laughter saying he could not help it. The outdoor kid took some time to make up with Shane and no longer came by after he got stitches and recovered but he eventually did. The outdoor kid was always full of energy and liked doing outdoors stuff. There was another incident that occurred near my house that was a close shave while we were riding bikes in a way we were not supposed to. As traffic passed the corner of my house we would take turns jumping off a sidewalk that abruptly ended

and landing into the street barely averting oncoming traffic. Some cars would stop and get out as we ran off, others would honk their horn in anger, and other cars would keep going as if we were not there. The outdoor kid did not time his jump correctly and he fell off his bike landing on his back in the road with a car's tire stopping right before it would have run over his head. I could only imagine what a gruesome scene it would have been if the car's tire did not stop in time. We got a good chewing out by the driver and that scared us cold turkey to never test our fate again jumping in front of oncoming cars with our bikes. Then there was the time Shane and the outdoor kid got in a fight competing to hop over a large hole with their bikes in an empty lot by Shane's grandparents house. The outdoor kid took a spill when his bike did not make it all the way while under-jumping the hole. The front tire hit the edge of the hole when he was landing and it made him flip over landing on his face. After scraping himself off Shane and the outdoor kid started arguing and maybe a punch or two was thrown after Shane said he won having little regard for the outdoor kid's pain. I tried to play peacemaker to no avail and they both stopped playing with each other for a while. I think what bothered the outdoor kid is we were a source of amusement to Shane like he found the unscrupulous behavior of the mullet kid as a

form of entertainment and the outdoor kid was good in nature like a boy scout, he ran on his tippy toes and had a straight posture like Forrest Gump never cursing saying things like "that's neat" wanting to have good natured fun, so over time there developed a character conflict between him and Shane. Things seemed smoother and more innocent when we all just met and became neighborhood friends. We would go to the grocery store down the street and ask the butcher for discarded bacon fat and then go to the creek and find crawdad holes that became active after it rained, we would tie a metal nut as a weight to a shoestring with a piece of bacon fat on it and put it down in the crawdad hole, when we felt a tug, we would pull the string real fast and out came a crawdad that we collected in a bucket. We didn't eat or kill the crawdad's or what are termed crawfish, but dumped them back in the water and watched them swim off backwards using their tail. One day things came to a head between Shane and the outdoor's kid, sometimes we would trek on our bikes south past the graveyard down the street and past another neighborhood to an open field with a old barn, we got off our bikes and walked into the barn, there were old stacks of hay and a rope hanging from the ceiling, before we knew it two other kids were approaching on their bikes, one was a big bully I recognized from school, he told

the outdoor kid to take off his shoe, the outdoor kid always wore the same shoes and they were pretty worn, at first he said no to the bully in a defiant manner and then agreed after the bully said he was going to fight him, the bully was with a shorter kid who was like his partner in crime, they put some fireworks inside the outdoor kids sneakers and started popping them and took great pleasure doing so laughing while the fireworks were popping inside his shoes much to the displeasure of the outdoor kid, then he said what are you going to do, kick my ass? and then pointing to the rope in the barn and how he could hang us but to our relief the bully was just playing around and soon rode off on his bike with his friend with some more bolstering and parting threats, the outdoor kid wasn't too happy looking at the smoke from the fireworks coming out of his sneaker. He turned the sneaker over to get the popped fireworks out and put his shoes back on. We decided to leave before the bully came back. Shane knew of a creek in a wooded area that was nearby and we all three decided to go explore. After I saw the movie *Stand By Me* it reminded me of the time all three of us went to explore the creek. Shane and the outdoor kid were there a week before without me and were impressed how isolated and untouched the creek was. We got to the wooded area and started to tread the water after hiding our bikes in the brush.

I remember it became a grueling exercise, more so than we thought it would be. We kept an eye out for water moccasin snakes that live around creeks and lakes in Texas. Shane spotted some big spiders called fishing spiders moving fast under the water, it freaked us out, we never saw that before, the spiders swam away from us so we kept on treading in the creek moving tree limbs and brush out of the way. We were covered in sweat, thirsty, and hot. We finally approached an open pond that led out of the creek where beavers made a dam out of twigs. We started to walk around the pond trying to spot the beavers but could not see any. The grueling trek through the creek and the unpleasant encounter the outdoor kid had with the bully made tempers flare. I was by myself on the other side of the pond and looked across the way and saw Shane and the outdoors kid start to argue and that led to a fight leaving one with a bloody nose, they both fell to the ground crying, Shane got the bloody nose and started cursing at the outdoors kid repeating that he gave him a bloody nose, the outdoors kid left by himself denouncing their friendship, the pond led to an easy exit, how we got home was vague, I believe we walked because it was already getting dark and Shane said we could come back later for our bikes that were hidden in the wooded area that led to the creek. The outdoors kid did not speak to Shane or come around anymore

after that.

Wylie, Texas - Steven Craig "Macaroni and Flees"

Another kid my age moved into the neighborhood right off the corner of our house down Fourth Street and also started going to my school. His name was Steven Craig. Like our family his family was poor but more strict. His father was a quiet man, a painter by trade and offered his services to paint wooden houses that had wood siding throughout the neighborhood. Shane wanted to go to Steven Craig's house knowing there was a new kid nearby to play with. I remember seeing Steven Craig at school, he looked like a nerd because he always wore glasses, a button shirt or sweater like his Mom dressed him but he really wasn't nerdy and at first he kept to himself like me having no friends at school, he looked not very friendly and had a serious demeanor. I wasn't too fond of the idea of going along with Shane to ask Steven Craig if he wanted to play but Shane convinced me and we knocked on his door. Steven Craig's Mom opened the door and we asked if Steven Craig was there. She seemed happy and pleased and said two school kids wanted to see him. I also got the impression his family moved around a lot because like the mullet kid I got the impression they were not from

Texas. We went to Steven Craig's room and it was neat and organized with a made bed. Steven Craig didn't have a lot of toys, he had board games like BattleShip and some baseball cards. We stayed in his room for a little while, to break the ice Steven Craig stared at me and said, "macaroni and fleas," and started laughing with his tongue between his teeth staring at me with his glasses. I couldn't help laughing back at his corny sense of humor. Steve Craig asked if we wanted to play a board game, Shane glanced at me snickering and suggested why don't we go play outside. Steven Craig asked his mom for permission to leave the house and she said yes but he had to be back by a certain time. Every time Shane and I would come over to his house his mother seemed satisfied, as she thought he was making friends. Sometimes Steven Craig would help his dad paint as if he was his apprentice and there was no joking around his Dad, painting was serious business. Steven and I worked up a friendship in school, we had a class together in English or Social Studies and would crack up in class. The teacher gave the class an assignment where each student would start a story and write a paragraph passing it on to the next student and the last student would conclude the story, then it would be read in its entirety to the class where we would each take turns reading it back. My paragraph was something

completely silly where I put the Green Giant into the story. The Green Giant was an animated TV commercial selling canned green beans. The class was pleased with how the story was evolving until I read my part and the teacher gave me an evil stare. Steven Craig thought it was funny and started giggling while everyone else was quiet and displeased how I messed up the storyline. One student who looked Native American wrote how he was a headhunter who collected heads from his enemies and hung them in his tent sounding like Tonto from *The Lone Ranger* when he spoke. His writing and delivery was very simple, reading in broken sentences, and it made me uncontrollably laugh. This was out of character for me since I wasn't very social or outgoing around other students and our English teacher who was serious and wore pointy glasses quickly focused on me coming to the conclusion I had a learning disability. She sent a letter home to my parents and wanted me to go to remedial classes but I noticed the letter in the mail and threw it away. In hindsight the teacher was probably right, I was lagging behind other students and was not very motivated to learn, often having a hard time focusing in class like I had attention-deficit disorder. Being put in a remedial class made me think of the banana bus that kids made fun of. A banana bus was a term used for a bus to transport special needs or mentally

handicapped students to school. My learning disability may have not been that severe but I knew “remedial” would have meant being put in a class with the slower students. I had one positive moment in class, the teacher wanted us to use what we learned in writing a story all by ourselves. She stressed the importance of me completing this assignment in order to pass. I actually did some homework and wrote an entire story that was similar to the movie *E.T. The Extraterrestrial*. The teacher seemed overly-impressed by my story and raved about it saying she was going to submit it as a finalist with other papers from other classes. One day at Steven Craig’s house Shane took notice that he had baseball cards but Steven Craig explained he wasn’t a serious collector and only had a few. His parents only allowed him to have certain items they approved like board games and educational items. At the time Cabbage Patch Kids was really popular and a collector card parody came out named Garbage Pail Kids. Garbage Pail Kids became all the rage, Shane mentioned to Steven did ever hear of Garbage Pail Kids? So we all three started walking to the convenience store buying packs, opening up the packs eager to see what grossed out card we got, and laughing at the characters on the way back while chewing the gum that came with the cards. I found the cards a bit cruel and unsettling and just like that the popularity of Garbage Pail

Kids faded. One day in Steven Craig's room Shane looked at all the cards we collected and concluded it really was garbage and threw them all in a wastebasket in Steven Craig's room. We all agreed that we were tired of looking at the faces with snot, pimples with whiteheads, and other gory grossness depicted in the cards. One day Steve Craig's parents bought him a new pair of glasses and it seemed to do wonders for his self esteem at school, he was more social with other students and had a new air of self confidence. In English class a young female teacher who was very extroverted wanted the students to come out of our shell by having each of us put on a talent show in front of the class, this would boost grades for students like myself who were lagging behind. All we had to do was show the class a performance. She would talk with students in the beginning of class and developed a friendship with the more popular students who could be considered the teacher's pet. I got the impression she liked attention rather than just teaching and used the students to keep her entertained. This was a class I despised going to and sat quietly at a desk by the door waiting for it to be over. The day came for everyone to show their talent, the teacher said even if you didn't plan anything, get up in front of the class and do something. Everyone was talking about a student in another class who dressed in blue jeans and

cowboy boots and sang a country song and how good he was. The teacher finally got around to me and I sat there saying nothing almost in defiance, then she paused and said if I just get up and do anything I get a passing grade, but I sat there quietly, some students tried to urge me to stand in front of the class but I refused, the teacher said okay, looked down on the grading paper and gave me a failing grade. The young teacher in her 20s made an impression on the school principal and the entire school was ordered to gather in the school gym and watch the winning talent perform. It was the student who dressed in blue jeans and cowboy boots, the teacher pressed play on a boom box and he lip synced *Mountain Music* by the country band Alabama while holding a guitar prop. The student lip syncing looked serious staring straight ahead moving the wooden cut out guitar like a real country singer would while performing. Many of the students clapped after the performance but some could be overheard making fun of him as we were leaving. I had a crush on a popular blue eyed, blond haired girl named Jenny White, and we would exchange glances but I was too shy to talk to her, to my surprise Jenny White would be in one of my classes and she sat right behind me. I sat perfectly still not turning around, then she asked the teacher if she could move to another desk. I think I made her uneasy

seeing I was too shy to work up a conversation. She eventually became interested in a more popular student and was a fan of Cincinnati Bengals quarterback Boomer Esiason who was considered a hot NFL quarterback during that time. One day we were all sitting in the school gym forming a line during PE class, Steven Craig was sitting behind me and I noticed Jenny White further down the line, I thought I would grab her attention by goofing off with Steven Craig, we started to play a game of tag, I would slap him on the arm or chest and he would slap me back real fast, we slapping each other so fast I accidentally hit his face right between the glasses and his new glasses broke in half. Steve Craig exclaimed, you broke my glasses! You did that on purpose! and in full aggression started punching me in the stomach over and over again knocking out my air. I was shocked by his sudden bout of aggression and tried to stay nonchalant even though I was gasping for breath, I told him it was not intentional but he disagreed. Then Steven Craig said the glasses cost over a hundred dollars, you have to buy new glasses or I'm going to kick your ass. His friendliness suddenly turned into a serious and mean looking Steven Craig. I thought about how I could afford to pay him since my Dad was always broke. I thought about asking my grandparents like my parents ask them for money but I couldn't

bring myself to do it. I tried to avoid Steven Craig in school after that but when we would cross paths he made a gesture with his fist that he was going to beat me up. One day I walked home trying to avoid an encounter with Steven Craig but there he was to meet me in a neighborhood alleyway not far from the school, other students gathered around and wanted to see a fight but it wasn't much of a fight, I made a pathetic display pleading for mercy, I even said I would eat grass off the ground. Part of my reluctance to get in a fist fight is I had an overbite and was afraid of being punched in the face losing a front tooth. It seemed a long time had passed and Shane asked me to come see Steven Craig again but I refused. Things were not the same after I broke his glasses and saw his mean side, I couldn't bring myself to go. Maybe it was guilt that I didn't pay for his glasses, I thought it could be a trick, his parents could demand the money going to my parents, then there was also his abrupt change in behavior going from friendly and playful to threatening. What if I did something to make him mad again? Shane said he wasn't going to beat me up and kept saying he wanted to see me but I wouldn't go. One day Shane said Steven Craig's family moved from Wylie back to Canada and that was the last time I heard of Steven Craig.

Wylie, Texas - My Dad Continues to Build His

Saucer

My Dad was making progress on his flying saucer in the yard, instead of just a frame he was putting sheet metal around it using rivets and screws. I was out playing with Shane and came back to my house seeing my Dad in the yard and saw him using the screwdriver, I asked, can I screw? He said no! and I asked again can I screw, please Dad? I want to screw. My dad said no, we walked away and Shane started snickering, he said my Dad thought I was talking about sex. Although my Dad was making progress on his saucer things were becoming more tough, the power was turned off again, and he was back to tapping power out of the power line in the back alley even though he was warned against it, he told me to stay away from a bucket of salt water that had high voltage from tapping the power line, he was using it to weld. I laid down on the cement tornado shelter in the backyard and my Dad was taking a break sitting nearby. I saw a gallon of gas used for the lawnmower. Below me was an ant mound, I poured a little gasoline on the mound, and grabbed a lighter nearby that my Dad used to smoke with and told my Dad look I'm going to light this ant mound on fire while staring down, he said no, it will burn your face, I said no it won't, my Dad said move away and he lit the mound, the flames shot up past where my face would

have been, I was petrified and thankful for my Dad's wisdom but my Dad was not impressed with my lack of common sense. He had other things on his mind like paying the electric bill, rent, it seemed like the chips were stacked against him.

Wylie, Texas - Pee Wee Baseball

One day Shane came up to me and said he was enrolling in Pee Wee Baseball and wanted me to sign up with him but I wasn't so eager. I would have to buy a uniform and be part of a team. At school I was a bit of a loner, also fearful of a ball striking me in the face since I had an overbite and didn't want to lose a front tooth. Shane however convinced me to sign up. I was put on a different team than Shane and recognized some of the other boys from my school were on my team. I wasn't a very good baseball player, the other boys had more dedication practicing at the batting cage, the coach would occasionally play me only to see me strike out because I was afraid of the ball hitting me in the face, he put me in the outfield on occasion and I had one good play where the ball was hit in my direction and I made a diving catch to a ground ball much to my surprise and everyone else's. One thing that I remember about playing Pee Wee Baseball is the concessions. A popular drink was nicknamed the Bloody Mary that was a mixture of Dr.

Pepper and Big Red soda. One day while walking home from school one of my baseball teammates was walking behind me and made a derogatory comment for not being a team player, I don't know what got into me but I pointed at him walking toward him and we started throwing punches rolling around in someone's yard with another kid yelling fight! fight! and a small crowd gathered around to watch. The person who owned the house came out and told us to get off his lawn breaking up the fight. I dreaded going to school the following day because I would have to see the baseball teammate thinking there may be another fight. The day came and as I was walking to school I saw him with other schoolmates bouncing a ball off the school's wall, one of the students spotted me and to my surprise they greeted me and invited me to play with them but I declined and kept walking into the school. It seemed my fighting garnered a little respect like it was a type of bonding. The following evening when I showed up to Pee Wee Baseball the kid I fought with didn't pay much attention to me, probably because I didn't befriend him at school earlier in the morning. I forgot how Pee Wee Baseball ended, I may have stopped going after that. I have a recollection of asking Shane how his team finished, he said not that well, not much better than my team that didn't win very many games.

Wylie, Texas - Did My Big Sister See Madonna?

One day my big sister ran inside the house looking shocked, she said she saw Madonna pass by in a limousine staring at our house that had the Italian flag hanging on a pole. She was convinced it was Madonna and not someone who looked like her. She described a limousine slowly passing our house and a window in the back rolled down. It was the Pop singer Madonna staring at our house and then the limo drove off. Maybe Madonna was passing through Dallas on tour but it seemed unlikely she would venture all the way to Wylie just to look at our house, sure the Italian flag my Dad put on a pole in our yard was unusual but enough to attract the attention of Madonna who was an Italian American? Maybe Madonna had another reason to be in the area, I can only speculate if it was really her.

Wylie, Texas - The Australian Kid

At school I made a new friend. He was a new kid from Australia. The teacher introduced the new student to the class and said he was new to our country. The Australian kid sat by me and would also talk to me in school. He also spoke English being from Australia but was still getting acclimated to American culture and would ask what an American

term he did not understand meant. Some of the students would poke fun of his Australian accent referencing the movie Crocodile Dundee. He invited me over to his house that was a brick home closer to the school and about a 15 minute bike ride from my house. He had a personal computer in his room, I forget which type, something similar to a Commodore 64, his family also had cable television. I believe his Dad relocated to America for a computer related job or was a computer programmer. The Australian kid was a fan of baseball and like Steven Craig he had baseball cards but was more serious about it. We would play out action fantasies in his yard, he would pretend to use a broom stick as a sword. One day the Australian kid wanted to go to my house but I was a bit embarrassed to show him how I lived. One day we did, he saw my sisters, my Mom and how messy the place was, roaches crawling around the kitchen, the salvaged metal my Dad had in the yard and I could tell he was put off by it, it was not the way he was raised, his parents tried to fit the image of a typical medium class family similar to Shane's family or what is termed keeping up with the Joneses. One day he wanted me to ask my parents to buy a baseball glove so we could play catch throwing baseballs and I said I would ask. I told him I played in Pee Wee Baseball but was no good at it and he said I could get better with practice that's

why I should buy a glove. At school the Australian kid was becoming more comfortable socializing with other American students and making new friends. I thought to myself he's going to discover that I'm a loner and won't be much of a friend anymore or become more distant. Shane would sometimes ask why I couldn't act like I did while playing with him when I was at school. I think because I was conscious of being poor and also my appearance not having newer clothes like the other students. It made me more withdrawn but then again I was always shy or an introvert even as a child and would easily blush.

We Go to Our Grandparents During School Break

When the holidays approached it meant some welcome time off from school and my parents would take us to visit our Grandparents in Comanche, Texas or drop us off at our rendezvous point at the Denny's in Benbrook. After arriving at their house in Comanche my sisters would share a guest bedroom and I would sleep in my grandfather's bedroom where he had a small spare bed in the corner of the room. My grandmother had her own room and spent a lot of time inside reading. She had an instinct in knowing if we were doing something wrong and would come out to see what we were up to or if in the

kitchen. I believe my grandfather was not yet retired from radio or he was semi-retired at the time. He would take us to the local radio station which was a small building on sparsely populated land with a radio tower. I wasn't thrilled at going to the station because it would mean socializing with the staff and feeling awkward but went along because that's what my grandfather wanted. Entering the radio station there was a desk with a charismatic secretary named Betty Hayes who would write copy for commercials and answer phones. I always remember the old time soda pop machine that dispensed glass bottles of coke. Betty would get a coke out of the machine and give it to us exchanging friendly banter with my grandfather. She would put us on the spot asking us questions and then when laughter rang out Betty would glance at my grandfather like she was putting on the charm. Another employee named Peggy would also get in on the action talking to us. On the wall was a picture of my grandfather when he was a young disc jockey and his radio station partner who did not live in Comanche but was also involved in other radio stations and would only come around the station every so often. My grandfather would sometimes take us to see the radio booth where there was a disk jockey. Walking down a hallway there was a room with a large glass window and inside was seated a disk jockey behind radio equipment like a

microphone and mixing desk with pots or knobs, a rack of 8 track tapes for commercials, some turntables, and a box speaker close to the ceiling for monitoring. I remember there was this local disk jockey who wore old glasses that made his eyes look big, and he planned out every minute of his show on a piece of paper, he just gave us a blank expression and continued what he was doing, occasionally talking on the microphone and playing a radio spot from an 8-track. There was also a show in the late afternoon where locals would call on air about things they wanted to sell, a garage sale etc. Reading the obituaries was also popular since it was a small town with an aging population where everyone knew each other and some lived in the small town for generations in what they would term as "kinfolk." My grandfather didn't particularly like the disk jockey with the glasses but he was a character and a familiar voice to the locals. My grandfather moved to Comanche, Texas during the 1960s from the Texas Panhandle and tells the story of trying to play easy listening music on the radio since he was from the big band era and the locals wanted him to change the music to country. Betty Hayes would always try to get my grandfather to do something since he was there - like record a radio spot and he would take us into another room with old recording equipment and record a commercial by

reading copy that Betty Hayes typed up like an ad for a local business. He would warm up his radio voice by saying a few words and read the commercial to some backing music. He'd find an instrumental 7" vinyl record kept on a rack, and turn the music volume up and down as he talked while he made the commercial. An 8-track tape with an old commercial on it would be erased using a magnet that made a loud buzzing sound and used for the new radio spot. The Comanche Chief, the local newspaper, was the radio station's main competition since they both competed for ad revenue. My grandfather would take us along with him to run other errands like picking up mail at the post office from his mailbox, going to the local radio shack for electronic equipment, the hardware store, and sometimes he would take me to the barber shop located in the town square that had a red and white stripe pole outside. Inside the barber shop were barber seats where the height could be adjusted using a lever and there was a large mirror covering the entire wall, seats were lined up to wait for your turn facing the barber with local ranchers and men wearing jeans sitting there. The barber was neatly dressed and well shaved, wearing a barber apron, he wore glasses and reminded me of actor Jim Varney, he would talk with the other men who were reading the newspaper waiting for a haircut and make polite

conversation or local gossip. He would also give some men not only a haircut but a shave. He would ask me questions like if I had a girlfriend in his Hey Vern, Ernest voice or ask about school, or where I was from and then exchange friendly banter with my grandfather or the other men waiting for a haircut. After the haircut he would use a soft brush to clear hair trimmings off the neck and a little powder afterward for a smoothing effect. During the fall or around Thanksgiving when we would visit my grandfather he would give us all buckets and a feed sack to go pick pecans from pecan trees on several acres of land he owned that also had an unoccupied small wooden house with a barn structure for storing bales of hay and a storage shed. My parents tried living in the old house when they had their first child named Milton who tragically died while playing on the railroad tracks nearby and was run over by a train. During the time of Milton's death my Dad was away serving in the Army and my Mom was recovering from brain surgery. We would sometimes visit Milton's grave located in a cemetery off Highway 16 toward De Leon, Texas. To get to the property to pick pecans my grandfather would drive his old Chevy pickup truck down a dirt road after exiting Highway 377 as if going down the highway leaving Comanche. My sisters would pack in the passenger seat and I would sit outside in the pickup truck

bed holding on for dear life with the wind hitting my face and blowing past my ears. While driving my grandfather would smoke a pipe rolling the window down a little for ventilation and there was a stick of Wrigley's gum on the dashboard or ash tray. My grandfather always had a stick of gum around to have fresh breath since he worked in radio. It was in his pickup truck and at home on top of the kitchen cabinet. My grandfather had his radio tuned to his radio station KCOM while driving and country music was playing like The Gatlin Brothers, Ricky Skaggs, and The Judds. After exiting the highway and driving down a dirt road, crossing a railroad track, and kicking up dust we arrived at his other property located on a country road. My grandfather got out of his truck to unlock a fence that had a big metal lock and chain around it and would drive on the grass hitting bumps as we bounced around until we got underneath a big pecan tree, then we all got out of the truck and grabbed buckets and started looking on the ground for pecans, when we picked most of the pecans we could see on the ground my Grandfather got a large wooden pole he kept on his property and used it to shake the tree limbs until more pecans started raining down on us. You could tell the pecans were ready to pick because they started coming out of the husk and some of the husk filled with pecans already fell to the ground.

Picking pecans wasn't easy, we briskly picked up pecans one by one putting them in a red bucket and sometimes getting into arguments if we tried going where someone else was picking. My grandfather would tell us to pour our buckets into a feed sack and finish up picking when it was time to leave. He would exit the property and drive us to a cattle feed store that buys pecans from the town locals, inside there were old men seated around a fold out table playing dominoes, a man that worked there greeted my grandfather and then took a sample of a pecan to inspect it and crack it open to see if the pecans were good, then he weighed the bag. The price of pecans like all things in agriculture varied from year to year. He would hand my grandfather some money and my grandfather would divide it between us. I forgot how much money we got, it wasn't a lot but still enough to buy a toy or candy at the store. When we got back to my grandparents house my grandmother had dinner ready. My grandparents grew up during the great depression and were frugal. The staple meal was beans and cornbread and maybe another vegetable like green beans or broccoli. My grandmother would not cook beans out of a can but from scratch soaking dried beans in water and then boiling them with minimal seasoning, maybe some bacon grease or pork fat. She would cook cornbread in the oven, the pan had bacon

grease on it so the cornbread wouldn't stick and would come fresh out of the oven when it was time to eat. Sometimes we had frozen pizza baked in the oven along with a salad with ranch dressing. When it was time for dinner we sat around the table and said a short "God is good" prayer before eating. My grandfather would always wake up making a cup of coffee, then return for lunch and take a nap on a recliner in the living room while listening to elevator music, there was a faint radio station from Dallas with the call letters KAAM that played the classics like Frank Sinatra; The Four Preps; Nat King Cole; Lawrence Welk etc, for supper we would all sit around the dinner table around 5PM and then watch TV during the evening. My grandmother's favorite shows were Wheel of Fortune; Murder She Wrote; and Matlock. I would make an innocent comment while watching a TV show with my grandparents and if it had a double meaning i.e.

Hemingway's iceberg theory, my grandfather would chuckle smoking his pipe and glance at my grandmother. My grandfather did not watch a lot of TV, mostly sports like the Dallas Cowboys and maybe the evening news. He would say television is a vast wasteland in reference to a famous speech by Newton Minow who was a former FCC chairman. Since my grandfather worked in radio he would also comment about the announcers and told the story of Jimmy the

Greek a sports announcer who was fired after making on-air comments about black players. He told the story of a basketball sportscaster that described a player leaving the game and going to the bench because he had a boner. My grandfather would sometimes have to broadcast high school basketball games for his radio station and said he wouldn't have said the word boner if that was the reason the player was benched. When we would stay with my grandparents during the Christmas or the Summer break for a week or two the initial excitement of arriving would wear off and boredom would set in, as well as growing tensions and fighting amongst my siblings. My sisters seemed to have a better time at keeping themselves occupied, whether it be playing with barbies, or drawing their own cut out characters. My big sister would look through my grandmother's old magazines from the 1960s and 1970s. I remember one retro teen-oriented magazine my grandmother had from her teaching days called *Bananas*. There were the illustrated children's books of Richard Scarry, who drew anthropomorphic animal people and many copies of Reader's Digest, there was always one in the bathroom, also old issues on mainstream publications like Time Magazine kept in cardboard boxes gathering dust. I would sometimes venture to the pond next to my grandfather's property that could be viewed from the front porch. The pond

belonged to the owner of a car dealership in town who had many more acres. Small ponds are scattered across the countryside in Texas because it's a water source for cattle who graze on the grass fields. To get to the pond I would carefully hop over a barbed wire fence that separated my grandfather's property. It was trespassing but my Grandfather said it was okay since he knew the land owner, in fact the pond used to be part of my grandfather's property until he sold it. I would carefully walk through the grass to the pond to see if there were any snakes on the ground but it was rare to see any. Occasionally I would see a Texas horned lizard blending in with the sand or some rocks or what people in Texas call the "horny toad." Sometimes my grandfather would take us fishing at the pond using an old fishing pole he had in the garage. The pond had mostly catfish but also crappie, and bass much like the fish at Texas lakes, there were also turtles. The pond was surrounded by trees and sometimes clear enough I could look in the water to see if there was anything moving around and sometimes I would see a fish. The water level at the pond reflected the amount of rainfall. My grandfather told the story of how the pond once dried up and there were only some catfish wiggling around in the mud. There was one type of slimy catfish we always caught called a pollywog. It had a big head and big whiskers making

sounds with its mouth. We would always throw that catfish back into the water. I was too afraid to swim in the pond just because it was very murky and dirty and I couldn't tell what I was stepping on. Comanche, Texas is a sandy region, and the pond would lose water during the Summer months. The sandy dirt was good for farmers in the area who grew peanuts. Sometimes peanuts fell off trucks and would litter the highway near my grandparents house. Before returning us to our parents my grandfather had a surprise. To my delight he took out a new baseball glove that he bought at the store. I was excited to take it back and show my Australian friend so we could practice throwing baseballs. My grandfather must have heard about my request for a baseball glove and decided to surprise me. Our grandparents drove us to the Denny's in Benbrook in their 1984 Oldsmobile to meet our parents and my parents drove us back to Dallas. My grandfather before parting ways as we stood around the Denny's parking lot would hand my Dad some money which put a smile on my Dad's face. On the way back to Dallas my Dad would sometimes stop at a park in Arlington or Grand Prairie by exiting the freeway where there was a large pond with ducks. My Dad was particularly fond of ducks and got a good chuckle watching the ducks swim. The park also had a miniature locomotive train to take park goers on a short

ride. He would also sometimes stop at the Fort Worth Water Gardens in downtown Fort Worth and we would all carefully walk down the steps surrounded by streams of water. My Dad liked to debate and shout really loud with my Mom over politics and religion like having a quarrel and I remember once trying to lay down in the back seat where you put your feet and my Dad reaching his hand behind the seat yelling don't sleep back there because of carbon monoxide poisoning which could be deadly if you fall asleep. The beat up 1970s used cars my Dad used to drive often smelled of fumes.

Wylie, Texas - The Australian Kid Moves Back to Australia

After returning home from my grandparents I couldn't wait to show my Australian friend the glove my grandfather gave me. The next day I went to his house on my bike and saw him playing in the yard with a Latino neighbor boy who was a few years younger than him. I was met with a cold reception, the Australian kid looked in my direction but did not seem enthusiastic about me returning. Then he finally acknowledged me and asked what happened to me? I told him that I went to my grandparents and that I already told him I was going before I went. I said look what my Grandfather gave me showing him the baseball glove and he went

on to berate it saying it was made out of cheap plastic not leather and would split in half if a fastball came my way, then he started playing with the other kid, at this point I was upset and had a headache. I got on my bike and peddled home, then I changed my mind and turned around, I was going to give the Australian kid a piece of my mind and I started riding my bike standing up to pedal fast with tears streaming down my eyes, a girl that went to my school walked out of the house and saw me while looking concerned, she also knew I was friends with the Australian kid, when I got there the Australian kid was no longer outside, only his neighbor friend, he asked why I returned and I explained I wanted to know why the Australian kid was being so mean and the neighbor kid said his family was moving back to Australia. It didn't seem that long when I remembered him first being introduced in class and over time he became more and more like any other American kid and now he was going back to his country. I understood his cruel behavior and left. I started thinking that since he wasn't very nice after I returned from my grandparents I shouldn't say goodby, then I felt better on the bike ride home, in truth I knew it may be emotional or awkward. When I got home I hid the plastic baseball glove in the back of a drawer, the Australian kid had a point, it was a bit cheap, my grandfather was frugal and thought I

wouldn't know better and I knew he meant well but I didn't want to be seen with it and I could no longer think of a reason I would use it. Pee Wee Baseball was a bust and the Australian kid was moving, he was no longer someone I was going to play with.

Wylie, Texas - My Mom is Pregnant and Dad Goes On The Run

It didn't seem long after I returned from my grandparents that my Dad took me with him to pick up beer cans. There was a wooded area between Wylie and Garland that we stopped at on the way back home. Sometimes my Dad could find beer cans there because people would go to the woods and drink. He laughed and showed me a small pine tree decorated hobo style using a roll of toilet paper like it was tinsel garland Christmas tree decoration. Once my dad went to the woods to cut down a small pine tree as our Christmas tree instead of paying for one. Earlier that summer my father was exploring the stream in the creek and came across what he thought was a dinosaur bone that came from an eroded creek wall and if excavated it may reveal more dinosaur bones. He tried calling a local TV station thinking that the petrified dinosaur bone he retrieved could be worth something. The TV station expressed interest but a news story never materialized. I asked him to show me

where he found the dinosaur bone in the creek. We trailed through the creek trying not to get our shoes wet, the creek had these eroded rock walls and I could easily see where erosion may have exposed a dinosaur bone. My father couldn't remember where he found it and had trouble locating the exact spot, it was getting late so we returned home. My friend Shane came to the house, he was friends with the outdoors kid again, they made a discovery while exploring. The City of Wylie stored lost or confiscated bikes outside on a bike rack that was kept unchained at a remote building. We decided to go there when it started getting dark and when we arrived we waited and looked around to see if anyone was there, and then slowly walked up and each took a bike walking off quietly. We then picked up our pace and started running off with the bikes. After we got a distance away and the coast looked clear we all busted out laughing, happy and excited about our new found fortune. These were not top of the line BMX racing bikes but still good enough to ride around the neighborhood. I vowed to never shoplift or steal again after getting caught at the grocery store down from my house when the mullet kid was my neighbor but this seemed different - the bikes sitting outside not being claimed were just going to waste. Back home to everyone's surprise my Mom announced she was pregnant again by my Dad much to the

chagrin of my Grandparents. They commented she was too old to get pregnant considering our family was big enough with my Dad's frequent employment struggles. Later in her pregnancy during the warmer months she hurt her foot and ankle stepping into an open utility meter in the front yard. My Dad, who was already mad at the City of Wylie and the electric company for frequently turning off the power, got out his welding equipment and welded the meter shut. This was considered a crime by the City of Wylie and a warrant was issued for his arrest. What transpired was a high speed police chase once he was spotted, my Dad escaped by ditching his car and running through brush or what he called swamp near the airport, he said he wound up in Louisiana, went to sleep in a public park on a table and woke up surrounded by alligators, frightened he jumped on a bike that he was using that had a flat tire and rode off as fast as he could, eventually he wound up in Florida and got drunk behind a liquor store where he was arrested, then transferred back to Texas where he spent some time in jail. While my father was in jail code enforcement informed my Mom or landlord, I don't know the particulars, that scrap metal and the half-built saucer my Dad was welding was a code violation and there would be a huge fine if not disposed of. My grandfather who rarely drove all the way to Dallas drove to our

house and I helped him load the welded flying saucer frame into a utility trailer attached to his truck, we then drove to the landfill and my grandfather kicked the saucer frame out of the utility trailer with my help and said, "doesn't that make you sick?" It didn't, in a way it made me sad. I wanted to see him complete the saucer and see if it would fly. My grandfather on the other hand was not as curious and saw my father as a nut. He just desired for us to be a normal stable family. We made multiple trips hauling other metal and electronics my father salvaged and stored in the yard and also from the tornado shelter behind the house.

Wylie, Texas - My Grandparents Try Coping With The Extra Burden

My grandparents were not happy having to drive to Wylie and haul my Dad's salvaged junk and welded flying saucer to the landfill. They were tired of always having to help out and only brought two of us back with them, my big sister and I. My Mom was left in the house with my little sisters and there was no electricity or food. My grandparents said they could bring two us back with them. We pleaded with them to bring my Mom and my little sisters but my grandfather said you can stay here if you don't want to come along. I sat in the car quietly, feeling guilty on the drive back. At the time I didn't understand

but in retrospect they may have tried to build hatred toward my Dad. On the way back I would begin to speak starting a sentence and not finishing it. I don't know why, maybe my brain was cluttered with all of what was going on - too much to process. This annoyed my grandfather and he did the same to mock me. I saw his mean glance in the rear view mirror. There was tension in the air unlike when we would make trips during school break. I felt like my grandparents were giving me a complex like they knew the fruit didn't fall far from the tree. I wasn't exactly overachieving in school like my big sister. By the time we got back to Comanche at my grandparents house they cooled off and lightened up a bit. They were concerned for my Mom and I forget how long we were there but we did return to Wylie, like when we lived near Lake Ray Hubbard, my grandparents decided it would be best if we continued our school there, I think partly due to my big sister who had friends in Wylie.

Wylie, Texas - Shane's Grandfather Dies Falling Off a Tree

Tragedy struck my friend Shane, his grandfather across the street died while trimming tree limbs in the front yard using a chainsaw when he lost balance and fell to his death. Shane came to break the news to me and was saddened and a bit angry trying to

cope with a loss at his age. My Mom some weeks earlier when my Dad was on the run yelled at Shane when he came over to see if I could play, I forget the reason why she yelled at him but Shane became angry and said he was going to sue my family because of how my Mom yelled at him and chased him out of the yard. I told him he was saying that because his grandfather died and was still grieving, please don't sue us we are poor, I pleaded. He agreed and said he wasn't going to sue, he knows my family is poor and said his parents were preparing for his grandfather's funeral. Weeks passed by and I didn't see Shane, his grandparents living across the street was the reason why he came by to play. Meanwhile my Grandfather thought it would be best if we moved. I don't think the landlord was happy after the city complained about the junk in the yard and my Grandfather thought we may be better off without my father around when he gets out of jail. My grandfather found a brick house closer to the school in Wylie. I went to visit Shane at his parents house, he was no longer mad or grieving and seemed like himself again, the big athletic kid who at school said I would be more popular if I removed the moles on my face was there with Shane. We all started walking on the highway near Shane's parents house and started singing Michael Jackson's song *Bad*, then the big athletic kid mentioned not far away was the

axe murder house, also known as the Betty Gore murder, that received a lot of publicity and media attention. My grandfather moved us to the new house and also bought my mother a used van to get around because my Dad ditched his used car when he was on the run. I believe my mother just gave birth to my sister Christa before we moved to the new house. My big sister made a best friend in school named Christie and she would spend more time at her house.

Wylie, Texas - Sex Education and Early Puberty

The school sent papers to give to my parents to notify them about a sex education class, after gym class all the male students were seated in a room where we watched a video describing adult male and female biology and sexual intercourse with some students giggling and cracking jokes, after the video the teacher turned the classroom lights on and asked if there were any questions. Before the sex ed class at school my Dad tried the birds and the bees talk while he was driving in his car and was very much against porn seeing it as immoral because of his Catholic faith. He would talk about a golden shower or people drinking urine to illustrate how deviant or perverse sex can be. I discovered masturbation before we moved from the house on Masters Avenue while sitting in the

bathtub and noticed the pleasurable sensation of moving my penis back and forth between my legs as it became erected where I climaxed with a little semen coming out. I drained the bathtub water and let the water run for a while to make sure no trace was left behind. Although the experience of an orgasm was initially pleasurable I didn't feel that good afterwards like there was shame or guilt. It was like Adam & Eve eating the forbidden fruit and being exiled from paradise. I was starting to hit puberty. After moving to the new home rental in Wylie away from Masters Avenue I would occasionally keep masterbating in the bathtub pushing my penis between my legs. I would still visit Shane and the outdoors kid but not as often, partly because his grandparents house was no longer across the street, his grandmother was still alive so Shane would still go there but playing like we used to no longer felt the same. It seemed like my childhood was slipping away, I was turning into the adolescent kid in Italy who would rummage for thrown out porno magazines near Luigi's house. My mind was more foggy, I seemed less sharp, and I was becoming more clumsy. One day I was looking through the Greensheet newspaper classifieds, Greensheet was a free newspaper that my Mom liked, my Mom was a bit of a hoarder and would hardly throw anything away from old junk mail to classified newspapers filled

with adds like the Greensheet. I saw a classified ad that claimed a person could make good money stuffing envelopes, a small down payment to a PO Box was all I needed to get started, the amount of money I could make started going through my mind, then there was an ad for a free house in East Texas pine country, all you needed to do was come visit during an open house. I showed my Mom and she became convinced, maybe good fortune was finally coming our way. The day came for the open house and my Mom was actually going to try driving there.

Wylie, Texas - My Dad is Released From Jail

We were fixing to leave and take a look at a free house I saw advertised in the Greensheet that was in East, Texas, then there was a knock on the door, everyone became silent, my Mom opened the door and let out a yell, it was my Dad, he'd been released from jail and didn't look too happy, like a Western Film of a cowboy being falsely accused of a crime and finally released from jail. He was thirsty and asked for something to drink. My father somehow was able to find our new address and walked all the way from prison. My Mom and big sister tried putting up a fight, there was yelling, arguing but to no avail, he was our father and had no place to go. My Mom gave him a lecture about his employment troubles, the trouble building a

flying saucer caused and my dad agreed he would try to be better and acted cordially, feeling things out like he was the guest of our house. Our grandfather was paying the rent and put the new van in her name. After drinking some cola that we had in the kitchen he asked what happened to his saucer and was especially curious about the junk he had in the tornado shelter. We told him it was all thrown in a landfill by our grandfather after being ordered to do so by the city for violating zoning laws. He had a look on his face like someone threw out buried treasure. I later learned he made an ion wind discovery in Wylie from using electronics and stuff he found while dumpster diving that was hard to come by or not sold to consumers. Not only did my Dad want to put a car engine inside his saucer that turned a propeller for lift but he was also experimenting with electricity very much like Nikola Tesla and had plans to use electric wind or ion wind for thrust. My Dad showered, bathed, and rested up a bit after being released from jail and finding walking all the way to our house. I told him that we were planning to go see a free house in East Texas. There was an open house event in a pine woods neighborhood community, my Mom believed me and saw the ad in the classifieds. My Dad however said it wasn't a free house but a sales routine. Since the van was in my Mom's name and my father no longer had a used car

because it was ditched when he was chased by police, he said he would drive us there to East Texas to have a look since it was the weekend and first thing Monday he would have to look for a job. We all got in the van and headed toward East Texas down the freeway and after what seemed like an hour of driving the scenery started to change passing by lakes and seeing more pine trees, laying down in the back of the van I mentioned to my Dad the ad in the Greensheet classifieds about getting paid to stuff envelopes, all I needed was a downpayment and he responded it's a scam, finally we arrived at the pine woods housing development advertised in the paper, my Mom and Dad went inside the leasing center that looked like a log cabin, my parents were given a bait and switch sales routine, the house could be free if you buy acres of property and put down a large down payment or something to that effect. My heart sank, it was too good to be true, my Dad was right. The leasing center said we could drive around and have a free brochure, and asked if we could come up with the money for a down payment but they knew by our appearance we were poor and looked at us with pity and bemusement. My Dad drove around for a bit with everyone feeling awkward and after a few log cabins scattered throughout the woods, we all agreed to get back on the main highway and go home. My

Dad then said I told you you were wasting your time coming here. My Dad did not take pride knowing he was right about the bogus free house giveaway but seemed annoyed he had to go along with something stupid against his better judgment. My Dad was really eyeing the van because he needed transportation but he had to go along with what my Mom wanted because it was her car and he was on bad terms with my grandparents after going on the run and getting arrested. The next day my Mom wanted to go to the park, we went to White Rock Lake in North-East Dallas. White Rock Lake is a small lake in East Dallas bordering Garland, not like the bigger man-made lakes on the outskirts of the city like when we used to live near Lake Ray Hubbard, a miniature waterfall or spillway into a stream can be seen from Garland Road after it rains, there was also remnants of an old brick building from the early 20th Century, we had a picnic at the park and I was convinced the classified to get paid at home stuffing envelopes was legit but my Dad wouldn't hear it and said fine you can send them the money on your own dime but you'll get ripped off.

Wylie, Texas - My Mom's Van Gets In An Accident and She Barely Survives

My mom would use the van to pick us up from school and sometimes drop my big

sister off at her friend Christie's house, one of my little sisters and myself decided to go with my big sister to Christie's house after school and call our Mom when it was time to leave and go back to our house, Christie had a little brother named Chad around my age who was one of the popular kids in school, after visiting we called home and my Mom said she was on her way but it started to become late and she never showed up, so we called again but there was no answer so we began walking home. Christie's house was walking distance but it was a long walk, we had to walk up a narrow road that split from the main highway, in the distance we saw fire trucks with their lights on, there had been an accident, my big sister said could that be Momma? we started running toward the lights and it was my Mom's van, she had been involved in a head on collision, my sister started screaming no! running toward the van, my legs became weak and I yelled Momma running up to the van, My Mom was still inside with some blood coming out of her mouth, she urinated on herself and was calm, looked at me and held my hand, my little sister Alice banged her head on the dashboard was also in the car as well as my baby sister who flew from the back seat during impact, they had already been transported to the hospital, my Mom was in bad shape, one of her lungs collapsed and had to remain seated until it was determined

it was okay to move her to an ambulance, across the street was a wrecked truck by a teenage driver who played on the high school football team, he had a broken leg and didn't seem to be that bothered, my big sister told me to run home and tell my Dad, I ran fast as I could eventually reaching home flying through the front door yelling waking up my Dad who was taking a nap - that's why no one answered the phone. I told him what had happened and he seemed alarmed and rushed with me to the scene of the accident, we all went to the hospital in an ambulance and spent a lot of time waiting in the emergency room. My Dad phoned our grandparents and broke the news from the hospital, it seemed any sore feelings or animosity toward my Dad went away and they drove to Dallas in their 1984 Oldsmobile making their way to the hospital. A doctor informed us our Mom was in bad shape and was lucky to survive, she should be able to recover after some time. My little sister who banged her head hard had a visible bruise and swelling but would be okay too. We were all relieved that no one was killed in a horrible car accident and my grandparents realized maybe it would be best to have my father around. My Mom was involved in two car accidents in what seemed like a short period of time, the other one was a few years prior when living near Lake Ray Hubbard. I remember we went to the salvage yard to

take pictures of the wrecked van, and my Grandparents were going to help my Dad find another used car for the family. My Dad got a gray colored four door car from the 1970s with fading paint. During the 1980s used American cars made in the 1970s like a Chevrolet Caprice could be had for cheap and of course there were imperfections like dents, fading paint etc.

The Move to Sachse, Texas

I forget how long we stayed in the brick built rental house in Wylie that my grandfather moved us into after leaving the small wooden house on Masters Avenue but we weren't there long. I think the rent may have been too high, my Dad was itching to get back into his flying saucer and electric wind experiments so he always kept an eye out for a house to rent with a big back yard or around vacant land. He knew that trying to weld a flying saucer in a residential neighborhood close to other houses got him into trouble. He found a house for rent in Sachse, Texas, a suburb that was between Garland and Wylie. It was down a dirt road off a street named Sachse Road, the house was surrounded by a field and trees and it also had a garage. The street Sachse Road also went directly to our school in Wylie, although it wasn't close but we could still walk if we had to. My Dad moved us to the

house and I believe what happened is we finished our school year in Wylie and the school bus that came by our house went to Garland so we started going to school in Garland, Texas the following school year. I believe Sachse has grown since then with lots of McMansions and has its own schools but then there was mostly land and newer brick housing communities scattered about. My Dad took me with him to dumpster dive again in an Industrial Park and we came across building that had a hiring sign. My Dad hit it off with the boss there who when he heard my Dad's name Gene Watson he instantly gave him a job since the business owner was a fan of the country singer Gene Watson by the same. The job did not last long as my Dad would later get fired. It seems the jobs my Dad used to get like at Xerox or Texas Instruments were harder to come by after he was let out of prison, he would later claim that someone reported him to the credit union making it hard for him to find work and he believed it was my grandfather. To confirm his suspicions my Dad went through the local credit union's trash and saw his name on a computer paper print out. It's hard for me to say what exactly was going on but what I would describe as high strangeness started to occur in Sachse and my father also started to exhibit more bizarre behavior. My days of going to school in Wylie were coming to an end. Our parents would

drop us off in front of the school in my Dad's beat up 1970s car and my little sisters and I would dunk in the seat hoping no one would see us and then get out of the car real fast, blending in with the line of students walking to the school. I was in a class with a kid who was considered unpopular, a bit of a loner like me and reminded me of comedian Jerry Lewis, he then started to build popularity and favor with the teacher by telling a joke at the start of each class. One day I was waiting outside to get picked up and it was just me and him standing outside the school - all the other students already took the bus home or were picked up by their parents. He looked at me and asked if I ever wondered what penis tasted like. I told him I never tasted it have you? He said yes, it tasted salty, staring at me with a smile. Then I knew why he was a bit different, he was gay and was trying to see if I was too since I didn't fit in with the other students. There was a homophobic student in PE class that would keep calling anything and everyone gay like when we would walk around the track at the Wylie Owl football stadium that was close by to the school. Unlike the Jerry Lewis kid who used humor, the kid who appeared tuff on the outside calling everyone gay was probably gay himself. Luckily my Mom pulled up in the car and took me home away from the Jerry Lewis kid who was trying to feel out who else was gay. There were some days I had to walk

home with my sisters down Sachse Road which was kind of dangerous because it was a two lane street with no sidewalk that curved around and cars quickly passed by. I knew I was testing my fate and we would try to make it home as fast as we could. My big sister's art and drawing skills were progressing and whether we'd like to admit it my Dad's free thinking maverick ways were starting to rub off on us. Instead of becoming a cheerleader and dating a football jock my big sister was becoming a new waver and considered herself a feminist. My big sister not only had a girlfriend named Christie but a gay male friend named Ron. She was also becoming a favorite of my Grandparents. She was the alpha in the family and was more social around other people. In Sachse, my big sister had her own room, it was a small room toward the back of the wooden house, her room was decorated with posters, artist like INXS, George Michael, WHAM. She would get cassettes from the Columbia House mail order service that advertised cassette tapes sent in the mail for one dollar with a subscription. My little sister Teresa listened to my big sister's tapes and became a big fan of The Cure. I started to get into music from my big sister's cassette tape albums and from scanning the radio out of sheer boredom. I liked a song on the radio by a synth pop group named Information Society with their song that got radio play entitled *What's On*

Your Mind and my big sister had their album on cassette tape. I borrowed her battery powered jambox when my big sister was away and turned up the 'Pure Energy' part of the song where there is a beat breakdown like I was showing off to the neighbors in this distance who lived on Sachse Road who probably couldn't hear me but it gave me a rush, there was a swing in our yard that was just two pieces of rope tied to a wooden board, I would swing on it back and forth as I cranked up the volume on the jambox and then everything went black. The swing broke and I hit my head on the ground knocking myself out for a brief moment. I came to and felt pain to my head where it hit the ground and was thankful I was okay. I was no longer a small kid that a swing like that could support but growing and becoming taller.

Science Fair Project at Wylie School

My big sister's drawings and art were progressing beyond her make-believe anime characters that she called Eric Paris and she was eyeing a career in animation. Her favorite cartoon on television was *Saber Rider and the Star Sheriffs* and would try not to miss an episode, sometimes fighting over the TV when another episode would air. Like the Rocky Joe cartoon theme in Italy I still remember the opening there to the Saber Rider since my sister would watch it

religiously. The cartoon Robotech was also an influence since my sister liked anime. My Dad would get a job for a company in Garland that made night vision goggles. One day he came home theorizing how the gray aliens depicted in alien abductions may be able to see, their eyes would be similar to an insect. He also one day became excited about the Face on Mars after reading a conspiracy book. My Dad was interested in flying saucers again, enough time had passed since his arrest after welding the water meter shut in Wylie and my Mom's car accident, he felt that he could try again and start welding the frame of a flying saucer. This time it wouldn't be so obvious to others, that's why he chose the house in Sachse that was away from onlookers since the house was down a long dirt driveway away from the street. My dad would start gathering metal, and electronics from dumpster diving and tinkering around in the garage at the back of the house. I went with him again to look for beer cans and scrap metal in dumpsters at Industrial Parks and one night as we were returning home a big lightning storm came while he was driving with the sound of the crash of thunder and lightning strikes everywhere. My Dad started laughing while another lightning strike came close to us creating a loud crash of thunder. I asked him what so funny, and he said he was thinking about the boss that fired him getting struck in the ass

with all the lightning strikes, then turned to me like he said a funny joke and started laughing some more. One day I told my Dad I had to put together a science fair experiment that would be shown at the school gym in Wylie. It had to have all the steps like a hypothesis etc. I found the steps to be a bit confusing but my Dad thought it was pure joy and practically took over my project. He wanted to make it about a flying saucer and its propulsion characteristics. My Dad got a vacuum cleaner motor and attached it to a metal cooking pan to make a type of hovercraft or ground effect vehicle. It looked a bit crude put together but nevertheless when turned on with an electric cord attached to the wall it hovered a little off the ground moving around on a flat surface uncontrollably. The science fair day came and there were many science fair projects by other students. The smart overachieving students had their displays very well organized stating the various parts of an experiment. My Dad did too in a way, he enjoyed detailing how the hovercraft worked and was willing to answer any questions. It did not win but got a passing grade. I'm not sure if the teacher or judges looking at my submission thought I was the one behind it but probably appreciated the effort my Dad put into it and maybe thought science would rub off on me. At home I shared a room with my little sister but only when it was time to

sleep, I didn't stay in the room much. I would go outside or in the living room to watch TV. My little sister stayed in the room more and would draw and listen to music. My Mom and Dad would sleep in the living room located to the front of the house where the front door was and I remember my Dad watching intensely to an episode of Doctor Who that aired on PBS. He would also watch the TV show Baa Baa Black Sheep and of course Star Trek. There were rust spots on my Dad's beat up 1970s used car. One day he found some paint while dumpster diving that was gray and painted the rust spots but the paint wasn't an exact match. My sisters and I playing in the yard urged him not to do it knowing how embarrassing the car was when we were dropped off at school but he said his patchy paint job looks nice, my mother standing in the yard wearing red and white checkered bell bottoms still from the 1970s agreed with him. My parents would sometimes be lovey-dovey. One such time was when Mormon missionaries came knocking on the door. My parents said no thanks and shut the front door on them and then started laughing and holding each other. Both my Mom and Dad took religion seriously and knowing what they viewed as the right path over other religions made them happy. Sometimes in the morning I could see my parents holding each other after waking up with the occasional short kiss like they

enjoyed each other's company the previous night. The school year was coming to a close at Wylie. The bell rang and all the kids ran out happy and screaming. I saw a teacher from one of my classes standing by the exit door and I screamed, "I'll miss you like I miss spinach!" It was uncharacteristic of me since I was a loner and I could see it on the teacher's face. We never established a rapport like the student who reminded of Jerry Lewis who used humor and told jokes to the class. She glanced away looking sad with no laughter or acknowledgement. I stopped running and walked slowly away from the school waiting for my Mom to pick me and my little sisters up. I thought to myself why did I say that? feeling a bit embarrassed, not only that but I didn't mind eating spinach. I wouldn't have been so bad if I was doing well in class, then my loner ways would have been justified like being a quiet nerd. I no longer spent time playing with friends in Wylie like Shane, all my friends had one thing in common from the past - they lived in close proximity. I was also feeling the effects of puberty, noticing more pimples on my face. I tried creative ways to entertain myself at the house in Sachse with no neighborhood friends like exploring the creek nearby even though it seemed a bit creepy with just me exploring, I would throw a tennis ball at the house wall and try to intercept it as it bounced back, then I would have ant wars, a

game where I would disturb an ant hill and put a piece of flat wood near the ant hill and as the ants would crawl on the wood by the hundreds I would try to squash them all using a tennis ball before they reached me. I kept playing the ant war game until my Dad noticed one day and told me to stop. Many people kill fire ants in their yard using chemicals or insect poison but the act of what I was doing seemed like insect genocide. My green tennis ball would be stained brown with the blood of dead ants. The exhilaration and rush I got pounding ants away on a flat board turned to remorse like what I was doing was cruel, I could see my Dad's point and stopped after that.

Sachse, Texas - My Dad Finds a Mutt Dog

My Dad could see I was lonely, no longer having neighborhood playmates and one day brought home a dog someone abandoned on the highway. The dog was a type of mutt that was extra friendly and liked to play. My sisters were happy to see it too. I forgot what name we gave it but my Summer was spent playing with the dog. Meanwhile my baby sister Christa that my Mom gave birth to in Wylie didn't seem to be developing normally. She could only say a few words. As a baby my Mom would bounce her up and down on her knee saying "ugabugabegaboga" with Christa laughing. I remember going to the hospital

when she got vaccinated and she kept crying over and over again. My parents, seeing that she didn't start speaking like a normal toddler, took her to a specialist and it was determined she had autism. I would say bah bah bah tapping my hand over my mouth then my baby sister Christa would bang her head on the floor and start crying, My Mom yelled at me to stop. I thought it was funny but was too immature to realize Christa knew she couldn't speak and communicate normally like everyone else. Esther, my big sister took it upon herself to learn everything about Autism by reading books and so did my Grandmother. My autistic baby sister Christa seemed to talk more during those days when my Dad was there but later in her childhood calmed up, I guess realizing how she sounded to others. My little sister Alice would sometimes get in an argument with me while I played in the yard at the house in Sachse and I would be cruel calling her buck toothed until she started crying and ran back inside. At the time I didn't know of the potential harm I was doing to her self esteem. I went to explore the creek by my house with the mutt dog, this time it seemed more fun with a dog companion. The house in Sachse was surrounded by fields with an adjacent property that had a small pond and an area with trees. We weren't exactly isolated like living in a rural area. There were newer housing developments toward Garland

going down the street Sachse Road and the other direction was toward Wylie, Texas. When my Dad would return with groceries he would scare my sister's cat named Puter under the kitchen table by saying, "Boo" and laugh. The cat my sister adopted from the Humane Society when we lived by Lake Ray Hubbard was still with us and this would have been its fourth house. My Mom was becoming more affectionate with it and renamed the cat Sachse after where we now lived - she didn't like the name Puter. My big sister was starting high school and becoming a teenager and did not spend that much time with the cat.

Sachse, Texas - The Stray Dog My Dad Found Goes Missing

My Dad was dabbling with his experiments in the garage, it was a hot summer day and he pointed out to me a fly was pestering him because he failed to swat it. He showed me an electric wind experiment where he moved a metal rod close to a ball attached to wire and it moved away like repulsive magnets. The PBS TV channel at night would show old footage of a physicist who conducted experiments and this was one of my Dad's favorite TV shows. My Mom would laugh hysterically at reruns of Get Smart and also liked The Carol Burnett Show, also Evangelical preachers like Peter Popoff which

didn't make my Dad too happy. I walked into the garage where my Dad mostly stayed in his free time and I would see him write letters. He said he was in communication with a professor at a Texas University. Earlier in my Dad's life he befriended a professor at Arkansas Polytechnic College where my Dad completed a fiberglass flying saucer and claimed it flew off the ground. It was in the local newspaper and he said also made the college year book. I remember seeing a newspaper clipping of it that he saved in an old scrapbook, there was also a photo of him when he was in the Army. He said he had a motorcycle with a propeller on the back. One day my Dad brought home an Aerobie, it was like a frisbee but looked like a flat ring that can be thrown at long distances. We all went out in the field by our house and started throwing it and sure enough it would keep on going where we'd have to walk down the field to find it and sometimes it got lost much to my disappointment. One day I noticed the mutt dog my Dad found was gone, it was no longer there when I woke up in the morning. It's funny how we get emotionally attached to pets, I looked around for it, even went to the creek, in the creek there was the pit where it looked like a bulldozer dug a hole, with tree roots sticking out of the dirt, I thought maybe the dog was trapped and chased something but there was no response to my calls. I assumed my Dad dumped the dog off

somewhere for one reason or another but when I saw his car return to the house that day he seemed surprised that the dog was gone and said he would go look for it driving up the dirt road to the highway and asking a neighbor who lived near the highway in the distance. He came back and said the neighbor did not have it. Days passed and I was hoping the dog would appear but never did. I was saddened and even cried but was also curious like a Sherlock Holmes mystery wondering what could have happened to it.

Sachse, Texas - Seeing A Peeping Tom And A Hologram From Closet Mirror

My Dad was welding the frame of a flying saucer again, his welding skills had improved. This saucer looked more like a traditional flying saucer with a large skirt. At night I would play a game of running from the kitchen to the living room that was in the front of the house and throw a small ball into a bucket pretending two different teams were playing against each other. The front door had a round window and when I ran toward the front door to throw the ball into the bucket to my horror a military looking man with a pale white face was staring through the window with a blank expression and he was staring directly at me. I was so frightened I stopped in my tracks and let out a loud shriek. I ran to my Dad in the living

room who was laying on a bed taking a nap and told him what happened, he still wanted to sleep and gestured me with his hand to stop bothering him, then finally after my urging he got up out of bed wearing only underwear and opened the door, walked in the dark on the front porch and then came back inside and said there's no one out there and then went back to sleep but I knew what I saw wasn't a figment of my imagination. It looked like someone with a shaved head or military haircut put white chalk on his face and was staring in the window. My little sister Teresa later suggested it may have been one of the teenage boys who lived at the house near Sachse Road seen at a distance. There were tall weeds next to the garage at the back of the house where I was playing one day and to my shock a rather large dog ran out either a coyote or wolf, it ran so fast it seemed like a blur but I could tell it wasn't a domesticated animal or stray dog, luckily it ran past me, I let out a yell jumping back and then ran inside the house excited to tell my sisters but by the time they came out the wolf or coyote was gone. I thought to myself maybe that's what happened to the mutt dog, it was eaten by a predator lurking out in the tall weeds and wooded area. There's probably plenty of rodents or rabbits to attract such an animal because of the field, trees, and creek in the area. The summer time in Texas means roaches, our family

always had that problem due to my Mom's hoarding and a messy kitchen. Like in Italy when my Dad forced to hand wash dirty laundry in a tub he had enough and one day threw everything out of the house on the porch to try to clean and fumigate the house. There was lots of yelling by Mom and sisters, my Dad fending off the female assault as he dragged stuff out sounded like a quacking duck in his monotone Tom Hanks type voice. It was getting late on a hot summer's night and I could hear the Cicada insects making a loud drone emanating from the trees. I was breaking out more with pimples and going through puberty, I started using my hand to masturbate while sitting on the toilet, I was looking at women wearing panties in a clothing catalog and my Dad opened the door and saw me. I quickly bent down telling him to close the door but he had a proud smirk on his face and knew what I was doing. One day I saw two men in suits talking to my Dad outside the window. Like when a representative of Ross Perot went to see his saucer in Wylie my Dad became very upbeat and excited, he said a country in North Africa was interested in his saucer. Then one day he was no longer happy like an offer didn't fall through, I later learned my Dad said the country in question was not stable, going through a civil war and he didn't want to get involved. One night I woke up from a bad dream covered with sweat and on the verge

of a mental breakdown. I dreamed these floating heads were chasing me around my Dad's beat up 1970s car in front of the house. I sat up in my bed and stared at a mirror that was on the bedroom closet door. I started to see a small point of light appear from the mirror and it started to grow larger and larger as if it was coming toward me, it turned into a floating face that was transparent like an image from a projector. It appeared like one of the floating faces in the nightmare I woke up from. Unlike the dream where I saw the armillary sphere from some months earlier, what I was seeing now was from me being awake and I couldn't explain it as my imagination. I started to hear a voice in my mind that claimed the cut-up face I was seeing as a floating head was me from the future and this is what would happen to me unless I killed my parents. The suggestion to kill my parents from the floating face seemed so unconscionable that I became suspicious, to me it looked like it was not supernatural but some sort of technology or of artificial construct, I walked toward the floating face and said, "you're just a hologram" passing through it and continued to walk to the restroom to go pee. The feeling of utter doom like I was having a panic attack didn't seem natural so I went to my Mom and Dad in the living room with tears streaming down my eyes and I told my Dad what I just saw, his back was turned in the sleep position and he

said to go back to bed and that I was just having a bad dream but I got the impression he was half asleep and wasn't really paying attention. The following morning I wondered how the hologram emanating from the closet mirror was created. I noticed the closet mirror was facing one of the windows in the bedroom that had no curtain. I remembered the military looking man with a pale face trying to scare me from weeks earlier looking through the front door window. I thought to myself if it was a hologram it had to be coming from the bedroom window projected to the closet door mirror. That day my Dad wanted to pick up beer cans and go looking for scrap metal. I came along with him and he stopped at a grocery store, my Dad wanted to grab a two liter bottle of Coca-Cola Classic, while in the car I told him again about the floating face that looked like a hologram that came out of the closet mirror as a pinpoint of light and started to become larger as if it was moving toward me after I woke up in a cold sweat from a nightmare. My Dad had an alarmed look on his face and didn't say a word looking upset. Instead of going to look for scrap metal he went straight home. My father claimed he saw an apparition that looked like a hologram during the late 1970s at Mountain Creek Lake near Grand Prairie, Texas, a suburb of Dallas, there was also a Naval Air Station nearby. My Dad was renting a house in Grand Prairie and

he says his apparition may have been due to exposure to fumes or toxins from a job he was working at causing him to hallucinate. My Dad became moody and started to tear down his flying saucer, he only got as far as the frame but it was starting to take shape. This would have been the last flying saucer my Dad tried to build. I was disappointed, I asked him why was he taking it apart and he said he changed his mind on the design. His idea was to have a flying saucer with no windows that he would fly using a camera and a TV screen inside. I couldn't help thinking of a huge piece of welded metal lifting in the air with the loud sound of a V8 car engine and then crashing down to the ground with my Dad inside but he was sure of his design and did not see things that way. He claimed he would have tested it first by remote control attached by a cable. My Dad took me with him to pick up beer cans in a field not too far away where an outdoor concert took place. The landowner was there shooting his gun like he was having target practice. Instead of fleeing in fright my Dad approached him with me by his side and said he was just picking up cans and we were leaving. We calmly walked away and my Dad said he was glad he took me with him. My Dad didn't have a gun nor did he like guns but knew what could happen to trespassers in Texas.

Back To Our Grandparents During School Break

Before school started we visited our grandparents like before and they would help us buy school clothes. Sometimes they would stop and treat us for pizza at a place called Pizza Palace off Camp Bowie Boulevard in Fort Worth before getting on Highway 377 toward Comanche. We would all yell in the car and be happy going there. I would play skee-ball by purchasing tokens and I remember a miniature movie theater showing old cartoons with Mickey Mouse and Goofy. I had a hard time watching the cartoons, maybe they were too old. I was accustomed to the modern cartoons like the ones shown every Saturday morning on TV. I remember the cartoon Pole Position and all the cold cereal commercials. My grandparents were creatures of habit like taking care of their bills on a certain day or driving to the post office to get their mail from a PO Box at a certain time, and my grandfather was once again trying to buy me a pair of starchy dark blue straight leg jeans that was made for ranchers or cowboys, he also took me again to the local barber in the town square who said I was developing into a mean one, and my grandfather responded I'm soft as a pussy cat. My grandfather would do a radio remote from the Comanche Livestock Exchange Cattle Auction where ranchers buy

and sell cows and heifers to the highest bidder. There is the loud sound of mooing, gates opening and closing where cows run down a gate into the auction area, sometime a cattle prod is used to move the cow along to the auction are where all the auctioneers can look at it while sitting in the bleachers, most wearing blue jeans, boots, and cowboy hats, sometimes eating a hamburger, or food from the vending area, the ringman or auctioneer who talks at a lightning pace raises the price with each bid until there is a highest bidder. My grandfather pointed out that many of the bidders sitting in the bleachers make a facial gesture or touch their hat to place a bid while holding a poker face. Sometimes my grandfather would go to the cattle auction because he had cattle on his land, most of the time he would lease out his property to a rancher friend named Murf, who would have cows or heifers grazing on his land and then take them to auction when it was time to sell giving my grandfather a cut of the proceeds. My grandfather also used his land to grow grass and make bales of hay that could be sold and which cattle needed during the winter time. This was very common in the country as round bales of hay could always be seen from the highway driving through the countryside. My grandfather was skilled at communicating with different types of people, to the tuff or alpha personalities like at the cattle auction,

where my grandfather could cuss and swear, to more polite or reserved people where my grandfather was courteous and friendly, he would also flirt with women without hitting on them like when going to the bank talking to a bank teller or a receptionist at city hall when running errands, he also knew how to deal with rude or unfriendly people by staying polite or saying nothing, not getting in a shouting match, or not stooping down to their level then changing his demeanor once he drove off in his truck cursing the rude person. Of course everyone in town knew my grandfather by his name calling him Bill, and he was known as a friendly or approachable person. His way with people I think had to do in large part with how he was raised, brought up living on a farm with many siblings, he was the youngest of the bunch and well disciplined by his father knowing his manners and what was expected of him doing chores like milking cows. My grandparents had a surprise, it was an Atari video game console, they knew things would get boring at their house, the Atari was a bit outdated, I'm sure my grandfather got it discounted or someone gave it to him but my sister's and I were happy to play video games on it. The first console we got was the Atari 2600 and then an Atari 7800 that had more advanced graphics similar to that of an arcade machine. The Atari 7800 became prone to the joysticks wearing out rendering it useless.

My grandfather took the joystick apart and looked at it but could not fix it so I mostly played a game called Solaris on the Atari 2600. When the Atari 7800 was working our favorite games were Frogger, Pole Position, and Wizard Wars. Once I was playing on the Atari 2600 until I was tired of staring at the TV and I heard a loud boom. My sister's were playing outside when it happened. My grandfather would say those were jet pilots training on F-16's getting into a dog fight, sometimes the jets would break the sound barrier and make a loud boom in the sky. One day my grandfather needed to get something in Brownwood, Texas and I went along with him. On the trip back he saw I was frugal with money and gave me a lecture on money saying that by putting money away it accumulates over time and his total net worth is around one million dollars.

A Bed-Wetting Incident At My Grandparents

One morning I woke up to find my bed sheets were wet. Apparently I peed in my sleep or what is called nocturnal enuresis. This sometimes happens to boys when they start going through adolescence. My grandfather was an early bird and already left the room. What was I going to do? If my sister's found out there was bedwetting they would make fun of me because I was no longer a toddler or little baby and my passive aggressive

grandparents already gave me a complex. I decided to try and cover it up. I thought to myself no one will know if I get rid of the wet sheet because I slept in my own small bed that my grandfather put in the corner of the room. I removed the wet pee stained sheet and tried my best to dry out the mattress with toilet tissue. Then I opened the bedroom door and peeked out into the hallway to make sure the coast was clear and ran to the laundry room and hid the sheet behind the washer. Looking back it would have been better if I just told my grandmother or fessed up to her because she could sense if anything was out of place or if we were up to something but that's how I felt at the time, I was trying to avoid embarrassment.

My Grandfather Would Tell Stories Of The Great Depression

My grandfather during the evening would tell us stories from when he was growing up while smoking a pipe, he'd talk about Grandpa Wingo, or known to others as Plennie Lawrence Wingo, who was considered a character in my grandfather's family, Grandpa Wingo as my grandfather called him, tried to walk around the world backwards, Wingo had a handlebar mustache and would tell my grandfather and his young siblings to fetch water using a bucket and then trip them up with his cane where water

would splash all over them. My grandfather would tell the story of one day milking a cow in the barn during the early morning hours and a huge asteroid streaked across the sky making it seem like daylight outside where the streak remained in the sky for sometime afterward. When it happened he was petrified and thought the world was coming to an end. Another story he told was while laying in the grass looking up at the sky with his father in New Mexico they saw a triangle formation of UFOs zip fast from horizon to horizon then come back the other way. His father said the heavens have many strange wonders. This was when he was in the US Army Air Force. My grandfather wanted to become a pilot but during an eye test it was determined he was color blind so he became a mechanic. He talked about taking a ride on a bomber plane. He said in the Army the Jews wanted office jobs and Italian Americans who he encountered for the first time from the East Coast would check their mail for money and curse if no money was included without reading the letter. My grandfather would say Dago, an ethnic slur referring to Italians, but I think that's how people talked from his generation. Radio was a big influence on my grandfather as a child, his big brother who was smart powered the radio using a windmill when they all lived on the farm during the Great Depression. This was the golden era of radio shows with stories and

skits by voice actors played out live over the air before the advent of television. When he was in the Army he heard Orson Wells famous War of the Worlds broadcast and ran to alert the soldiers in the mess hall only to learn he was duped like many others who thought it was real. I told my Dad these stories and he wasn't impressed and said Bill, my grandfather once jumped off a train wearing wings to see if he could fly only to fall on his face. My grandfather would tell an embarrassing story about my Dad. My grandfather worked repairing radio antennas in Arlington, Texas only to see my Dad appear on the local news after ransacking a porno store citing religious reasons. My grandfather's co-workers in the lunch room stared at the TV and said who's the nut? This was the time of the sexual revolution during the 1970s and my Dad was very much against pornography and saw it as immoral. My Dad said he escaped by hopping on a reefer train or freight car but was later arrested by the police who took him to jail, stripped him naked and beat him up.

My Grandmother's Shocking Racism

When we would visit our grandparents sometimes my Grandmother who was a college educated person and also a teacher would shockingly point to a black person and say, "there's a nigger!" and repeat the n-

word. I would look around hoping no one overheard her. In Comanche I never saw any black people and didn't know the town had a racist past after blacks were run out of town when an alleged rape took place between a black man and a white woman. My grandfather did not share my grandmother's animosity toward black people. Maybe because he was half Native American and was a people person in the radio business. At the time I didn't know he was half Native American and I would see an old picture of him with a dark complexion pointing it out to him and my grandfather would attribute it to being outdoors all the time raised on a farm. He said he could stand on his head like a Comanche Indian while a horse was at full gallop and do trick riding. The Comanche Indians were known to be agile and very skilled horse riders. I could never understand what made my grandmother hate black people or if it had to do with anything in her past that provoked that type of reaction. I attributed it to her being from an older generation and always living in small towns. I brought up the issue of race when talking with my grandfather and he told the story of a local car dealer who was a cowboy or what some consider a redneck running off a black college student from Brownwood who came to his dealership to sell something pertaining to college and the car dealer saying, "don't you know we don't like niggers around

here?" My grandfather told the car dealer that that wasn't a nice thing to say. My grandfather also said in the past he would hear about lynchings in small towns but it's not activity he would partake in doing. Once my grandfather wanted to see if we could remove a big bush in the front yard while he was away doing something and my grandmother came out seeing us struggle to shovel around the tree and yelled, "that's a job for a big nigger, leave the bush alone." We all fell to the ground laughing at her shockingly racist remarks like it was something out of *Huckleberry Finn* but she was probably right, I could picture a big muscular black man or any muscular man for that matter having a better time removing the bush.

My Grandparent's Loyal Abandoned Mutt Named Pepper

One day my grandfather who was tending to his land where he cuts firewood and we would pick pecans, his land that was near the railroad tracks came across a dog that was abandoned. The dog was a mutt or cross breed of a Border Collie that someone had dumped off on the country road. My grandfather explained that sometimes people would dump unwanted pets on the side highway or a country road. He decided to rescue the dog seeing it run around his land

on a cold rainy day. The dog was thin and hungry so he took it back to his house to warm it up and feed it. My grandfather took a liking to the mutt and decided to keep it because it was friendly enough and he did not have a bulldog at the time. After a while English Bulldogs broke his heart because they did not live for very long and were high maintenance dogs. He tells the story of a bulldog dying when he took it to a pet hotel during an out of town trip, it was left outside in the summer heat. The mutt my grandfather rescued was named pepper. I forget how it got its name. Maybe it was my grandparents or by one of us during a visit. Pepper's name came from its appearance, looking spotty or freckled in the face and it turned out to be a good pet for my Grandparents. It learned how to help my grandfather spot vermin at night that were digging up his yard. It even saved me from stepping on a snake in the yard by rushing and barking at it. During a visit to my grandparents I decided to be cruel to the dog and stopped acknowledging it or just ignoring it. The dog did not know why and started to look hurt, even moaning. I believe my cruelty or mean streak had to do with not doing well in school and my grandparents being passive aggressive. They saw me as an extension of my father. I had a ball I payed with in my grandfather's yard and we all got in the truck and he saw how I was affecting

the dog with the silent treatment and abruptly put his truck in reverse and ran over my ball that was in front the yard and he said, "want to be cruel to the dog, I just ran over your ball." At first I was shocked and angered that he retaliated by running over my ball but I knew he had a point. My grandfather looked at me with sorrow in his eyes afterward while his tobacco pipe was in his mouth and started driving. I tried apologizing to the dog saying, "I'm sorry" trying to pet it but the dog looked weary. One day I was watching TV and one of my sisters yelled to come to the front glass door. Pepper had met another dog that looked like him and their butts were connected. We all started laughing and my grandfather said that they were mating. Pepper was a female and later after mating had a litter of puppies that my grandparents gave away calling the radio classifieds that the locals use to advertise garage sales and sell miscellaneous items.

Sachse, Texas - Taking The Bus To Garland ISD

When the summer ended the school year started and we were going to a new school in Garland, Texas and no longer Wylie. A school bus would pick us up from Sachse Road and the other students on our bus route were from the newer developed brick home neighborhoods and were more medium class.

I made friends with one student on our route that had long hair and had a way with girls looking like a young Brad Pitt, he liked the heavy metal band RATT and Van Halen and I would tease him about the Van Halen song *Finish What Ya Started* by Sammy Hagar, he didn't seem to mind and said he liked the song. At school though, like Shane in Wylie we parted ways and I was back to being a loner. What I remember most about school was the art class I had. The art teacher was a fan of Doctor Who, and built a replica of K9 the robot dog from the TV show. The art teacher was very stocky in appearance and looked kind of like Charlie Chaplin and had a passion for art. He didn't socialize that much with the other faculty and came to work driving a beat up Volkswagen Beetle like he was from the hippy generation. At the time, partly inspired by my sister's who liked to draw, I tried drawing my own comic book of punk looking characters in a post-industrial future. The art teacher saw this and claimed I was a genius and he was going to let me learn on my own instead of teaching me and said he thought I would become famous one day. A song on the radio about Doctor Who was being played by The Timelords named *Doctorin' The Tardis*. Someone brought it up in class since the art teacher was a fan of Doctor Who. The song used sampling that was considered new and a bit of a novelty at the time. I liked a song by the female rap

group Salt 'n' Pepa - *I Like It Like That*. It was a follow up to their hit *Push It*. I drummed out a break beat on the desk and a black student saw me and drummed out a rap beat on his school desk that was way better. I thought to myself since he's black he had superior rhythm. During a class on perspective I showed a kid next to me how to use a focal point to draw 3D buildings. I was already doing this in my sci-fi comic and the teacher overheard what I was telling the student and praised the student like he was a stand out ignoring me. The student acted like he discovered it on his own, not giving me any credit. I think the art teacher was trying to show me a life lesson, others will copy my ideas or use me without giving me credit - the very same thing my Dad would complain about when it came to his ideas. The teacher tried a contest after the Exxon Valdez oil spill disaster to see who could draw the best political cartoon and exclaimed I would come up with something brilliant but of course I went blank and my political cartoon wasn't very good, partly because it wasn't something I cared much about. My comic book I drew was a type of escape from the normal reality like current news or politics or from being a shy person. I remember in music class playing baritone horn that was like a small tuba. My big sister chose to play the flute. The school let us take home the instruments and practice. She practiced the

flute everyday after school and got good at it and would sometimes play the flute when she was stressed out with tears streaming down her eyes. At first I practiced too at playing the baritone and was good enough to win first chair. When the sun started to set at home I would play the song *taps* on the porch because it was a simple song. Then as lessons became more complex I dropped off and was in last place. I have a vague memory of the school band putting on a performance playing a song in front of parents, me tapping my feet to keep time, I remember the school band didn't sound that great but there were not very high expectations because it was just the school band.

Sachse, Texas - Strange Armillary Sphere UFO Dream

One night I had a dream that was out of this world. I was in school practicing the baritone and there was an announcement by the principal over the school public address speaker that everyone should go outside and bring their brass instruments. In the dream everyone except me was hypnotized and formed a line outside. I tried talking to people asking what was going on but they would ignore me. I went outside and there was a large UFO that looked like an armillary sphere with rings crossing each other in different directions forming a globe. It would

transport people who were standing in the line up to the craft. The armillary sphere would rotate in one direction picking up speed and then slow down and slowly rotate the other direction picking up speed and slowing down, the rings inside would rotate at different directions with people inside the rings standing up with their arms and legs stretched out. I stood there watching in horror as people were hypnotized being zapped up to the craft. The sight of the armillary sphere was frightening. I woke up feeling amazed about what I just saw in a dream. I went into my big sister's room and saw she had an album cover with human figures similar to what I saw in my dream with their arms in the air and legs stretched out. Then I started thinking the brass in my dream probably had to do with me playing the baritone and my dream could be explained by things I've already seen except the armillary sphere and its unusual rotation. People forming a line in a hypnotic state and being zapped up into the ship would have before The Borg appeared on Star Trek: The Next Generation. Could my dream have been some type of otherworldly communication trying to show a map of origin, or a type of cryptic information download to my brain since the UFO in the dream was in the form of a celestial sphere or astronomical rings? It's something I later thought about looking back but can only speculate, at the time the

dream struck me as something unusual, I woke up feeling overwhelmed and wanted to draw what I saw so I didn't forget what I dreamed.

Sachse, Texas - Going On School Field Trips

I always enjoyed taking the bus to go on field trips. It was an escape from the social anxiety I had going to my classes. We were instructed to bring a sack lunch on the day of the field trip. I would stare out the window as the class headed toward the museum in buses usually to Downtown Dallas or Fort Worth. The field trip I'm thinking of may have been Fort Worth because I remember the Omni Theater from when my grandparents took us there prior to the field trip. The Omni theater had a large screen that curved around in a large dome building. The seats were placed in a half circle going up in rows at an angle around the room to give a panoramic view and the sensation of 3D. A film preview would open with a helicopter flying and it was like I was in the passenger seat high in the air - it gave me the sensation of butterflies in my stomach. I forget what exhibit the class saw on the trip, I think it had to do with Ancient Egypt or it may have been King Tut. As the bus stopped we all got out to go to the museum and the joy I had escaping the classroom soon faded, everyone was with their friends and I was all alone. To

make it not so obvious I kind of paced behind groups of other students walking around the museum hoping no one would notice. During lunch I sat outside eating a ham sandwich and chips just staring at the museum architecture and King Tut exhibit advertising that was displayed around the museum. Like walking around industrial parks with my Dad there was some solace looking at the modern museum building, with its sharp edges and white granite walls as an escape from the ugly suburbs. After lunch we had to go sit in another room where there was going to be a demonstration. I sat alone in a row of chairs and heard some students sit behind me, then felt someone kicking behind my seat, I turned around to see who was kicking and it was the handsome Brad Pitt looking kid that liked Van Halen who rode the school bus with me from Sachse. He was with some girls and another cool kid from school. He said, "look, Stephen is sitting all alone" laughing in a teasing way and went back to conversing with his friends. The field trip was over and we all got on the bus to returned to school. I stared out the window on the way back feeling a sense of relief. It felt like I was a loner on exhibit and gawked at by other students for having no friends, it was not only the mummified bodies or the ancient Egyptian relics.

Sachse, Texas - Puberty At School

One day in class there was a big black girl going in heat or ovulating, she was sitting in the back of the class would say I need to fuck and screw so bad and kept repeating it over and over craving sex, I looked at her but didn't find her very attractive because of her large size. Another boy sitting at the other end of the classroom overheard her and seemed excited. The teacher asked what was everyone's favorite TV show and they all said the Cosby Show and then she asked what was their favorite food and everyone said pizza. When asked the type of job your parents do for a living most responded computer programmer that was considered very respectable during the 1980s. I wasn't sure what I was going to say when it became my turn. I may have also lied and said computer programmer because of my Dad's lack of a career. There was a cool kid in class and one day he got a cool mullet haircut with his head shaved on the sides and long hair in the back. Some of the kids made fun of him and when the class was over and the students were leaving I saw him crying and being consoled by the female teacher. He was social and sat near the front of the class always participating. There was a new kid from the East Coast who dressed differently then everyone else like the TV show Silver Spoons from the early 1980s. He wore a bandana around his ankle and also wore

parachute pants. Break dancing by that time was considered out of style. I remember him standing in line and some of the other boys giving him a hard time about his bandana. It didn't seem long that he was dressed like everyone else and did well fitting in with the other students. During the mornings when we would arrive by bus I sat in the cafeteria, the free lunch program allotted us breakfast that usually consisted of a cup of cold cereal. We were waiting for the bell to ring and a black kid who always joked around, cutting students down with 'your momma' insults sat across from me and started to cut me down making fun of my appearance, "you're so ugly that...you're so unpopular that...etc.etc." I sat there wishing I was more sharp witted and could counter with a good come back. There was a TV in the school cafeteria during the morning showing cartoons like Woody Woodpecker that was playing in the background. The bell would ring and we would all flock to glass. One tall Latino guy with a big nose who clowned around on the bus I took to school started breaking out with pimples, wore braces, and also started to become interested in girls. I noticed him in the hallway he started to dress nicer hitting on girls between classes like he had no care in the world what others thought. I thought to myself I wish I could be more that way but knew part of my shyness was from being poor. I just wore the same two shirts and a

pair of pants with the same pair of sneakers. My Mom and Dad would use the cliche that school is not a fashion show, you are there to learn but I knew that wasn't true - it did effect my self esteem. I would mostly keep a low profile not creating attention for myself waiting for the school day to be over.

Sachse, Texas - My Dad Was Reduced To Delivering Pizzas

My father's job making night vision goggles didn't last and he was reduced to delivering pizzas. He had to rely on my Mother calling my Grandparents asking them for money. He would say I didn't ask your grandparents for money, your mother did - knowing that my grandfather would have a harder time saying no to my mother. The fall and winter would be a trying time for all of us. I remember there were times when the hot water was turned off and I tried my best to clean myself with ice cold water while standing naked in the bathtub. My dad, desperate for work, started delivering pizza and we were hoping he would bring back pizza that was thrown out, sometimes his boss didn't like him doing that when food was thrown in the dumpster so he would come back empty handed. My Dad told stories of seeing all sorts of things while delivering pizza like a man opening the door to a vacant house, grabbing the pizza, and running out the back door. Another story

was a man opening the door and pointing a gun at him, my Dad moved the gun aside and said, "here's your pizza." During this time money and food was hard to come by and my Mom tried her best with what little food she could get her hands on. A usual dish by her was green beans, sliced potatoes, with hamburger meat cooked in a pan, sometimes there would only be Ramen Noodles, and other times we would go hungry relying on the free lunch system at school. My Dad relied on tips delivering pizzas, some days were better than others and you could see it by his mood or expression on his face when he returned home. It was a brutal way to make a living and to support a family. It was getting colder and Halloween was approaching, even though some of us were bigger kids we decided to go trick or treating at a neighborhood in Sachse more towards Garland not far away. It was a medium class brick home neighborhood, we all walked from door to door yelling trick or treat with other kids and we were all collecting nice size bags of candy. One woman opened the door and said you are big kids, where's your costume? but happy halloween putting more candy in our bag. Then when it was getting late my Mom would drive us home and we would put all our candy on the floor and sometimes would fight over it trying to grab a good candy we saw another have while eating it at the same time. The cold weather

months came and I remember a girl I had a crush on in class, I sensed she liked me too. One day she was sitting behind me in the computer lab and leaning back in her chair while talking to another girl and after smelling my hair said eww his hair is dirty, and that gave me a sinking feeling in my stomach, I was ready to cry, it was too cold to wash my hair at home that day, I usually did bathe everyday but it was really cold during the winter. My mother would open the electric oven door for heat, when the gas was on we would all gather around a small gas heater in the living room. Snow was rare in North Texas but one day it was like a blizzard outside and school was canceled, there was already a foot of snow on the ground, I thought it would be fun to explore outside and my little sisters came along, we walked through a field that was covered with snow as big snowflakes kept coming down and we went to some neighboring land that had a pond and a little dock for a small boat, normally we wouldn't trespass and only went there every so often, but there was no one outside but us. I didn't anticipate how heavy it would start snowing, also how hard the wind would blow, visibility became very low and we became scared, freezing we could only see a few feet in front of us, the land with a pond had a little abandon dilapidated shack, we took cover from the wind and snow blowing in our face behind one of the walls

and after resting a bit we decided to make a run for it even though visibility was low by retracing our steps eventually making it across the field and back to the house, one of my little sisters could hardly make it, it took all our energy. We warmed ourselves around the small heater, happy that we made it back.

Sachse, Texas - My Big Sister Coping With Peer Pressure And Poverty

My big sister may have started high school around this time, she was a new waver that dressed all in black, sort of like a goth person. She spent more time away from the house in Sachse with friends like her friend Christie in Wylie or her gay friend Ron. My sister one day returned from her friends and laughed at these little pictures of art that I cut out of a trade magazine that my grandparents had and stuck the little art pictures around the white wall in my room. It was like my own little art gallery or a sad attempt at one. She also laughed at a picture I drew in school that had little army men shooting at each other and I drew lines across the page showing the direction of the missiles or bullets going to one side or the other blowing things up. It was like a mini imaginary war drawn on a sheet of paper. In her room she kept a diary by her bed and would try to keep a record of her dreams and was reading a book on how to interpret

dreams, she also had tarot cards. One of my little sister's went into my big sister's room and found a letter from her friend Christie. Christie described having sex with a guy and wrote it felt good. My little sister's laughed at the letter, putting it back and walked out of the room. My big sister was writing letters to her friend for fun since we were now going to Garland schools. She also wrote in her diary every evening before bed describing the day's events. The stress of our poor living conditions was catching up to my big sister. One day I passed by her room and she was crying and my Dad was holding her in his arms to comfort her, they were both sitting on her bed quiet as she was sobbing. Before that I heard a commotion, like an argument between the two of them. My Dad suspected his employment problems being reduced to a pizza delivery driver had to do with external factors like he was blacklisted, he claims while digging through the trash or dumpster at the local credit union he came across his name to confirm what he suspected. He saw his name on computer printouts with bad credit. My Dad suspected my grandfather was behind it and reported him. One day driving down the road there was a sniper attempt where someone shot at my Dad's car tire blowing it out forcing his car to swerve off the road, with careful maneuvering he averted disaster not getting into a bad accident and only needed a tire change. He

says later when we met our grandparents, my grandfather opened the trunk to show him a rifle inside as a form of admission or intimidation. To this day my Dad believes it was my grandfather who took a shot at his tire but I don't remember my grandfather having sharp shooting skills or being an avid hunter, he only used his rifle to kill vermin around his house like a mole digging around the yard or sometimes to put a cow out of its misery or euthanasia in the event of a catastrophic cattle injury or disease. I couldn't help thinking of the strange things happening at that house in Sachse and is trouble in Wylie thinking it may not be my grandfather responsible for my Dad struggles. To make my Dad feel better about my grandfather I told him how my grandfather lectured me on money when I drove with him to Brownwood, Texas and said his net worth is a million dollars. This had the opposite effect. My Dad's eyes lit up like he just saw where the buried treasure was hidden and we were struggling when my grandfather was rich being stingy. My Grandfather later asked me why did I tell him that?

Sachse, Texas - Dad Goes Off The Deep End

My Dad was acting more moody like he was going through a midlife crisis and started to spend more time away from home at a local

bar, my big sister accused him of cheating and having an affair by going to the bar but he denied it. To save gas he started driving a motorcycle and wearing a leather jacket. One day while riding the bus home from school my sisters claim the students started laughing at a man on a motorcycle that could be seen driving behind the bus, it was my Dad wearing a space helmet. During the spring time my Dad started to become more religious and introspective, he had a fixation on the Virgin Mary, he would go out in the woods to pray, my big sister claimed he made a shrine. Once he used Nair Hair Removal cream to remove all his body hair and would go to Catholic Mass dressed in funny clothes like a tunic. We would all stand in the back hoping no one would recognize us. Then there was the infamous incident of wearing nothing but a trash bag and being completely naked underneath, forcing us in the car to go to Church as we begged him no and watched him walk down the Church aisle just wearing a trash bag to receive communion by the priest who after seeing my Dad in line had a surprised expression on his face. My sisters, especially my big sister, were visibly embarrassed and upset. My father claims he wore the trash bag like a poncho because it was raining that day and he wasn't completely naked underneath but that's not how I remember it. There was some crying and cursing at him when he left the church

by my sisters who gathered around his beat up used car. He just had a spaced out expression on his face with little care of how embarrassing we found him. He started dabbling in inventions again and welding near the garage where there was an old barrel that he used to burn trash, it also had some holes in it, one thing led to another whether it be burnt trash that blew from the barrel, or sparks from his welding but the field with high weeds near our house became ignited and a wild fire broke out and it started to rapidly spread throughout the field. My Dad claimed his heroics contained the fire from spreading out of control by taking off his shirt and slapping the fire out in places before it got too out of hand for the fire department to put out. He also blamed the landlord for not mowing the tall weeds which were a fire hazard, that did not help him, I stared out the window and my Dad was looking down kicking the dirt like a little child while getting chewed out by the fire chief. We were told to move after that and my Dad found a house to rent in Garland that was walking distance to our school.

The Move Back To Garland, Texas

We moved to a house in Garland that was very similar to my days playing with Dusty, a brick home with a back yard and a shed. It was not the exact same neighborhood but

looked similar. My Dad and my big sister who was approaching the age to get her own car and drive while still in high school would develop a conflict with each other. Things were easier when we were cute playful kids but it was becoming more difficult for my Dad as we were becoming older. It was easier to get money out of relatives when we were young but my Dad could see with his employment struggles that he could less rely on my grandparents if we were old enough to work. He laid down an ultimatum that when we were old enough to work we would have to give him our income to help support the family and he would give us an allowance. Of course, my big sister argued how absurd his plan was and wasn't going to agree to do that. My grandparents for my big sister's birthday bought her a Ford Escort compact vehicle after she got her driver's license and turned 16, my sister started looking for jobs at first applying to a Tom Thumb grocery store in Wylie, Texas and eventually getting a part time job at a movie rental store named Hollywood Video. She was around less often, at a friend's house, or at work when school was out. My Dad was still delivering pizzas unable to find the type work he used to get and was becoming religious and moody. One of my little sisters got a small kitten and I liked to squeeze it in a ball between my legs sitting Indian style pulling its ears back and it would make this funny expression. One day

my Dad saw what I was doing thinking I was being rough with the animal and the cat went missing, it is believed he dumped it at a park, I became upset and got on my bike and rode to the park looking for it but never saw it again. I often hear about serial killers torturing animals and I'm glad it never got to that point with me. My Dad later told the story when he was young he put a rubber band around a cat's neck until the cat was bleeding and watched it suffer, eventually taking it off. Maybe it was psychological on his part from being adopted like abandoned child syndrome or just a morbid curiosity that a person grows out of, in any case our older cat now named Sachse that my big sister got at the Humane Society when we lived near the lake in Wylie was still with us, surviving move after move, the cat ran away from me and my Dad when we are around like we were mad hatters and was now close to my Mom, I forget if the cat had kittens between that time, I recall it did and my sisters had to give the kittens away but it's a very vague memory.

Garland, Texas - The Boner Walk Of Shame

One day at school while going to my locker I got a boner and it wouldn't go down. I believe this is natural in adolescent males when they first start to get an erection. I looked around standing facing the locker for

a few minutes and my boner still wouldn't go down, I had to leave and go to class so I did the walk of shame covering my crotch area with a school book and binder. The art teacher was standing in the hallway and saw that I was trying to cover my erection while walking down the hallway and thought it was funny. Another time the art teacher standing in the hallway noticed that when I walked I had my head slightly tilted and he stared in my direction slightly tilting his head. He also saw a drawing I did about the strange UFO armillary sphere dream I had and recognized the object, I forget what he called it, he could have said armillary sphere or astronomical rings. The school year was coming to an end and my art teacher who thought I was a genius and would be famous one day opened my report card, he got all the class report cards and was to hand them out to students. He looked at my grades and it said I was held back a year, his face looked sad handing it to me like he was surprised. My Dad took me along with him to dumpster dive that day, I felt bad, if not guilty about being held back that year, we were walking in an alleyway behind some businesses in Garland, Texas and my Dad came across some thrown out dress shoes, he smelled the inside of the shoes and said, "a nigger wore these shoes" and said he could tell by the smell. Then junkyard dogs behind a fenced area started barking as we walked by and my Dad liked to

call them mutts, he said, “mutts, mutts” laughing. He told a story of working as a meter reader during the 1970s and encountering all sorts of dogs who chased after him. Then my Dad came across with a dumpster with scrap metal and started going through it, maybe there was metal there he could sell, a man saw him and walked out the back door of the business, my Dad started to talk to him about his flying saucer, saying that was the reason he was dumpster diving, the man must of thought that my Dad was crazy and told us he couldn’t let my Dad have any of the metal in the dumpster but wished him luck on building a flying saucer, and we kept walking, glad he didn’t call the police. That summer was one of musical discovery for me, my little sister Alice got a Casio SK-1 toy keyboard from my Grandparents for Christmas that had a lo-fi sampling option and much to her displeasure I would play with it sampling a rap beat off the radio and loop it recording it to tape on a boom box, then repeat the process using a second portable tape recorder until I had a song. I was starting to make music which was all new to me. I discovered the Casio SK-1 would interfere with an AM Radio making these weird modulating noises that I also recorded and used in my music. My little songs used the built-in microphone on the boombox, I had no idea what went into mixing or producing a proper song so it sounded very

noisy. I made a funny Bert and Ernie recording using a Sesame Street cassette tape by playing back their voices like they were making love, calling each other by name and grunting. My big sister came home from work and thought it was funny and clever. Around that time a community radio show, similar to college radio had local on-air talent and was listener supported, there was a show that played Industrial Music that I found a bit too harsh and dark for my taste but would curiously tune in on occasion. During that time the acid house Summer of Love was happening in England and the community radio program that played new wave and Industrial music started playing more acid house because trends were changing. What was happening in the late 80s with rave and acid house had an air of counter-culture like hippy's and psychedelic rock from the late 1960s. I felt an instant connection with the music I was hearing that wasn't mainstream and geared for the charts. It was like an affirmation and I became very excited recording what was being played on the radio to cassette. Before that I went to the record store in the shopping mall but to get the dance music I was hearing I had to go to a special record store for DJ's that carried imports and independent music. I heard the store advertised on the community radio program. I had my Mom drive me to the record store on Spring valley road in

Richardson that was north of Garland and I went inside, to my surprise there were a lot of vinyl records. I knew my grandfather had vinyl records from the past like at his house and his small town radio station but didn't realize DJ's still played them. I told one of the people that worked there if they had any cassette tapes since I only had a jambox and he gave me a cassette tape out of a case and I was happy to find one of the artist I heard on the radio. There were DJs that worked there all much older than me and over high school age giving me surprised stares because I wasn't old enough to drive, I must have looked like a kid. I went to the checkout counter and there was a balding man standing behind the counter who smoked a cigarette surrounded by posters and band memorabilia. He did not use price tags or a cash register just named a price like I was at a flee market, I walked out of the store with empty pockets but was excited to go home and play the cassette I just bought. When I got home it wasn't the same dance song I heard on the radio but a style of music called Balearic beat, it had a tropical vibe with soothing saxophone elements. My grandfather liked playing the tape in his Oldsmobile when driving us to Comanche or to the mall in Brownwood when we would visit them during our school break.

Garland, Texas - My Dad Claims Death

Threats While Delivering Pizza

One night my Dad came home from delivering pizzas and claimed he was getting death threats, someone like a stalker was calling the pizza place, we all got in the car and he went to a pay phone to call my grandparents, he wanted to stay with my grandparents awhile out of fear and for protection, my sisters were not so eager to move again especially my big sister who was in high school, they also started to doubt if someone was trying to kill him, it could have been a prank caller, my grandparents told him no - he could try calling the police. My Dad may have tried reporting it to the police but nothing came of it. I thought my Dad was sincere, he genuinely looked alarmed. Days went past and nothing happened to my Dad, one of my sister's taunted him asking why he wasn't assassinated. My Dad was having car trouble so he took my sister's Ford Escort to my Grandparents and my big sister came along since it was her car. I don't think my grandparents received him very well when he showed up driving my big sister's car. My Dad became upset when he found a voodoo doll under the car seat that one of my big sister's friends gave her. He thought the voodoo doll was intended for him and put there intentionally by her. On the way back they were arguing driving down the freeway in Arlington and a highway patrol officer

pulled my Dad over. The patrol officer was a large man and asked for my father's identification. He stated he was driving his daughter's car and didn't have any ID. Then my Dad found his name on a paper in the glove compartment and pointed at it and said that was me, the cop then took the paper and pointed at himself mocking my Dad.

Going To Grandfather's Family Reunion

During that Summer we all attended a family reunion that was going to be held by one of my grandfather's relatives who lived in Houston, Texas. We would all travel there by car. These family reunions would continue for years to come partly because my grandfather knew his siblings wouldn't be around much longer. He had one sister and many brothers growing up in a large farm family. The relative hosting was nicknamed Red. My grandfather gave him that nickname because when he was young he had bright red hair. He wasn't one of my Grandfather's brothers but was related to one of them. We drove from Comanche in my Grandfather's 1984 Oldsmobile, my Dad might have also taken his car and met up with my Grandfather's sister, who was a nice woman, she was married to a gray haired man who reminded me of Jay Leno and liked collecting vintage cars - he had a big garage full of them. He was a soft spoken man, some of us rode in

the car with my grandfather's sister and her husband, I was in the back seat and could see the back of his head, he looked like he suffered from high blood pressure, his face looked a little flushed or red, not too long after the family reunion he fell face down at the dinner table while having breakfast and suffered from a stroke. While in the car with them making polite conversation my autistic baby sister Christa was also in the car with us said the word "fuck you" and the reaction afterward was awkward silence, there was no laughter. Then she said it again and one of my sister's in the car with us tried to abruptly cut her off and cover her mouth saying, "no, no don't cuss and don't say that word." I started thinking in the awkward silence that they must think we cuss and swear around her and she's repeating it. My grandfather was better at handling such situations being a good communicator and having a sharp wit, he would have made light of the comment instead of awkward silence. We got to Red's house and his appearance reminded me of Herman Munster. He was a very tall man who walked in oversized sneakers. His wife looked similar to him wearing mom jeans, was also tall, had short cropped hair, and she had a smile looking similar to the comedian Jim Carrey. Red was a computer programmer and had a job at NASA in Houston, he also suffered from the shakes from falling off a ship and hitting his

head when he served in the Navy. I would ask him a question like when food was being prepared in the kitchen where he was helping out and he would address me in a loud serious manner as 'sir' in a commanding voice, but mostly did not pay us much attention, he was more focused on my Grandfather and his brothers. There were some kids and preteens around our age who were related to some of my Grandfather's siblings and we would converse with each at an area designated for the younger people. A kid my age was playing checkers and could beat me quickly every time, I felt dumbfounded and slow compared to him and he wasn't nice about it either, he said, "there I beat you again," but I could tell he practiced and played the game a lot. Red took us to see Johnson Space Center in Houston and we walked around a rocket that was retired and on display laying flat on the ground seeing its sheer size. Then inside a building there was a display of NASA history for the tourists. My Dad commented on a capsule used in the lunar missions. There was lots of down time, one of the girls was around my big sister's age and old enough to drive. She was part of my grandfather's big brother's family. His oldest brother was the smart one, he had white hair, and appeared more liberal, he may have been something like an academic or an art professor. We all sat in a van they used on the trip that had a

stereo system while she blasted the song *Unbelievable* by EMF after hearing another car playing music loud in the parking lot. Outside the venue where the family reunion was being held there was a small playground with swings. I put my belly on the swing seat pretending I was weightless like an astronaut kicking my legs to move the swing and spin around in all directions. My big sister was inside showing slides of her art, some of which she entered in the high school art competition winning a ribbon. I recognized some of the art from when we lived in Sachse, Texas.

Our Dad Puts On A Scene At Big Sister's Art Show

Before the family reunion my big sister entered her art in a high school art contest and the winning high school artist had an art show inside the Garland shopping mall. There was commotion between my Dad and my big sister at the mall. I didn't see it happen, the art contest didn't interest me much, it was what you'd expect from high school students from Garland, low rider automobile sketches, superhero comic book drawings, a painting of a students pet, my sister was more sophisticated trying defy convention that was predominant in North Texas, she talked of the controversial art display *Piss Christ*, and railed against a

conservative figures in politics like Jerry Falwell. I was walking around the mall with my little sisters, then my big sister, all red faced, came crying running toward us and said my Dad put on a scene in front of everyone in front of her exhibit. He thought some of the art was not appropriate or contained nudity since my Dad was serious into his Catholic faith. Like in Sachse, Texas my Dad was going off the religious deep end and made a shrine centered around the Virgin Mary. He used the storage shack in the backyard for his shrine. One day my big sister ran inside and was laughing. She said she saw my Dad masturbating to the Virgin Mary, he came inside shortly after and said he wasn't masturbating. Then there was the day one of my sister's thought she saw a man in the backyard, my dad taped a toy gun with a sign underneath that said, "gun inert unless trespassed." My sister saw it and laughed thinking it would not scare off an intruder. One day my big sister was happy, she said she went to a dance club with her gay friend Ron and he got drunk afterward and kissed her in the car and that was her first kiss. My sister tells how Ron's life was met with tragedy after he got in a car accident on an icy day that paralyzed his little sister who was in the car with him. Ron could not face his family again and lived a life of hedonism going to dance clubs and getting into substance abuse.

Garland, Texas - Sam Houston Middle School

When school started in Garland we had to take a bus, the school was walking distance but it would have been a long walk so I took the bus with my little sisters. I remember on the bus there was one Latino student who was really into Vanilla Ice and the movie *Born in East LA* and would wear a bandana around his head. On the way to school the bus would stop at a low income apartment and a gay black student with a large butt would get on the bus along with a rather big pre-teen boy and his small friend or cohort. I could tell both the big pre-teen and his friend were poor and a bit juvenile delinquent. The black gay student with a big butt used humor as a way to fend off the two delinquents who would try to bully him. His appearance reminded me of the RnB singer Luther Vandross - only with a rather large rear end. The apartment did not look too welcoming, I'd imagine living there was like hell or Dante's Inferno. I stared out the bus window and was glad we didn't live in that apartment even though we were poor. I stayed quiet on the bus not wanting to bring attention to myself. I was in Middle School around this time, I'm sure that's when I was held back a grade or it was the year after I was held back, I forget, but I do remember I took the bus with my little sister Teresa, it was Sam

Houston Middle School in Garland, Texas. I remember there was an English class where the teacher liked reading a book about homeless kids on a trek to find their long lost relative in order to adopt them. The story struck close to home because I was poor. Part of the teacher's fascination with the book was her medium class background and trying to fathom what such an experience would be like. The story told how the orphaned kids sometimes went hungry and had to steal and she could not relate to such a level of desperation. The teacher was popular with the faculty and seemed a little stuck up. She was well to do, lived in a nice two story brick home or a McMansion in a nice neighborhood like in Highland Park, and was married to a lawyer. She asked the kids in class what their favorite movie was and they all said *Home Alone* with Macaulay Culkin. There were two white trash brothers who looked like twins and one day they came to class smelling like cinnamon, they were eating these cinnamon sticks that got all over their hands, the teacher liked them because they were social and would make the class laugh but they would show up late to class or not show up at all sometime. She had to send them to the principal's office because the cinnamon sticks were too strong and getting all over everything. Their hands were stained yellow and all the students were staring at them. A memory that sticks with me going to Sam

Houston Middle School was the PE class. The PE teacher looked like a drill sergeant and had short hair with bangs cut across in a straight line. Once I forgot to put shorts in my locker and the coach made people who forgot their gym shorts to wear football player pants. It was now my turn to put on the football pants. I got dressed and had to go to the gym wearing tight football player pants showing my lower body's contour, we had to each take turns throwing balls in the gym and some of the females in the class were staring at me like I was naked. I tried not getting an erection for the remainder of the class. Another memory of Middle School was watching a slide show by a professional photographer who was into rustic Americana photos. The slide show was all black & white showing poor working-class people, wearing plaid shirts, Wrangler jeans, and an old farmer standing in front of an old barn with lots of wrinkles. None of the students liked the photographs. The late 1980s and early 1990s was all about Pop music and big hair, many of the students dressed to reflect trends wearing MC Hammer parachute pants with the pointy shoes, or looking like Vanilla Ice. The females had big permed hair with a frizzy curly ball in the front. My sister's would make fun of this hairstyle. We called students with Pop culture or commercial taste preppy and students into sports like football 'jocks.' My big sister would make fun

of the color sea green. The colors hot pink and sea green were very popular at the time. There were a few alternative kids that were dressed in Dr. Martens shoes, wallet chains, and an Industrial band t-shirt like Front 242. I related more to them but did not dress cool and never befriended them. I put tape covers of the music I purchased inside my binder to show off my music although I was too bashful to work up a conversation. One of the alternative kids made a convincing computer generated voice like the German band Kraftwerk that was in the type of music I liked and I overheard them talk about a dance club for pre-teens. I was tempted to go but wasn't old enough to drive there and had no friends to drive me so I never went. The teacher in one of my classes played a VHS of computer generated animations that had the music of Peter Gabriel's *Sledgehammer*. The computer generated images were not very realistic and primitive by today's standards, very clean looking with lots of empty space but considered cutting edge for its time. In one class the students had to go to the computer lab for educational exercises and I got the impression a girl liked me. I overheard her say she liked a song by the dance music group Deee-Lite entitled *Groove Is in the Heart* that was being played on the radio. I had similar taste in music but never had the courage to strike up a conversation. One day an antisocial kid was enrolled in the

school, I could tell he came from the streets and was poor. He had trouble fitting in with the other students, attending classes, or showing up late and would have to report to the principal's office. One day when school was let out he and another student, a Latino kid, were going to get in a fight right outside the school's main entrance, kids gathered around and to everyone's shock the anti-social kid pulled out a knife after being punched in the face and he said, "your dead," and took a swipe at the Latino kid's head, he ducked barely averting being stabbed in the head, then the anti-social kid ran off and was chased by the Latino kid and was never seen again after that altercation. Later I overheard he was expelled from school. One day while taking the bus to school the bus stopped at the scary apartments and the black homosexual kid with a big butt got on and was having banter with the big bully kid and his short friend cohort. I got caught up in the conversation and said something to the bully in a joking manner and the bully, instead of finding my comment humorous, pointed at me and said he was going to beat me up. I told him it was just a joke but he wouldn't hear it. I sunk in my seat, and thought now I'm getting into a fight with a big bully kid who was very large and became overcome with anxiety. After school instead of taking the bus home I walked home with my little sister and we decided to stop at a

convenience store and get some fountain drinks. We had to walk home past the scary apartments and I started to feel better drinking the fountain drink and talking to my sister. I thought maybe the big bully kid forgot or wasn't being serious and started to feel better walking home. Out of nowhere appeared the bully kid and his short cohort smiling. He came up to me pushing my chest with his hand and awkwardly said do you want to fight? I felt my stomach sink and said no, then before he could throw any punches I told my sister to run and I darted off dropping my drink on the ground crossing a road where there was busy traffic barely averting being hit by a car that honked its horn but the traffic stopped the bully and his cohort in his tracks and he yelled, "you pussy, pussy, pussy!!!" My sister crossed the road and finally joined up with me looking shaken, I said how stupid the big bully was with a shaky voice still having an adrenaline rush and we continued to walk home. Once we got home the wall in the living room had my Dad's writing, a diatribe about religion. I read some of it with my sister and then turned on the TV and started watching TV. The next day my Dad got in a shouting match with my Mom and yelled, "she's not giving me anymore pussy!" She stopped having sex with him. He later claimed her evangelical church and my Grandparents were urging my Mom to file for divorce because of his

employment problems and erratic, unstable behavior. We took the school bus the next day. I was dreading seeing the bully that wanted to fight but to my surprise he left me alone. I was getting more into music and by that time I had a turntable, it was given to me by my grandparents, and I played a trippy record that looped over and over that I bought at the record store that carried dance vinyl, imports, indie music. My Dad overheard it and went into my room, grabbed the record and broke it in half claiming it was the type of repetitive music used to brainwash POW's in Vietnam. He also didn't like me banging a piece of sheet metal he salvaged while I was trying to record the sounds with a tape player. One day I got in a fight with my little sister Alice over the Casio SK-1 sampling keyboard because it belonged to her as a gift and I was using it all the time - she stomped on it and broke it to pieces. I was crushed, that was my main instrument in my sound experiments. It was also the source of prank demo tapes I would send to a radio disk jockey who would sometimes mention my name on the air until the show got tired of me. One trick I liked doing using the keyboard was putting it close to an AM radio where it caused radio interference. One day I heard a voice emanating from the boombox and I became ecstatic. It was like another person could hear what I was doing causing radio interference and was trying to

communicate back. It was like a CB radio voice but distorted. I could not discern what was being said. I thought I made first contact with aliens, somehow those noises I was generating causing interference with the radio was sending out signals. The voice kept repeating with an echo until eventually fading away. I thought I made human history but later concluded it was probably a truck driver.

Garland, Texas - My Mom Divorces My Dad and He Bails To Italy

My parents marriage was at its end as my Mom shut herself off from my Dad. She cited it was money or his employment struggles. I forget the timeline of when my Mom filed for divorce but the end of their marriage would have been in 1990 or 1991. The last memories of my Dad in America was him driving us, excluding my big sister who was always away, to a classic rock concert at the Cotton Bowl near Fair Park in Dallas and me cussing him out with cruelty on how much of a rotten father he was while he was driving us there, my Dad kind of glanced at me staying quiet and we stood by the car outside the concert with lots of white trash drinking beer walking to the concert on a hot summer night and him not looking too happy. He was planning his escape knowing how much of a tuff time he would have trying to pay child

support. At that time I would have been in my freshman year of high school. The last memory of my Dad was him sitting in the driveway with a front wheel removed from the car and trying unsuccessfully to fix the wheel bearings. He had no money for a mechanic and was looking down silently with sweat dripping from his face. I tried saying some words wishing there was some way I could help but he just stared straight ahead. I was too young to work and not old enough to drive. Maybe I could have done more, like go around asking neighbors for money or holding a sign on a street corner for donations but I didn't have it in me. Then one day he was gone, he bailed and took a flight to his native country Italy never to return to America. He may have taken out a loan to get the money for the one-way airline ticket. My Dad later told me what happened after he arrived in Italy. He walked to his Italian sister's house from the airport with no money and just the clothes he was wearing, his sister's husband Nicole or Italian brother in law told him to go back to his family in America. Nicole didn't want him to move to Italy, and he could not stay at his sister Rosa's home. My Dad was back to his orphaned childhood with nowhere to go or a place to seek shelter. It was snowing and he took refuge huddled under a tower at the airport nearby. Eventually Nicole, seeing he was in Italy for good, helped him get a job as

a welder at a business that makes construction cranes. My Dad's fascination with the Virgin Mary and his dedication to the Catholic Church waned, he describes an encounter with a priest after he returned to Italy who did not permit the divorce. After my Dad left we had no anger and resentment like other children who've gone through a divorce, in fact a sense of new found freedom or relief. This was partly due to my Dad's employment struggles and his religious moody if not bizarre behavior. My grandparents however were not too happy like someone being stuck with a bill at a fancy restaurant. My Dad was no longer in the country and they knew he would not pay child support.

My Grandparents Were Not Happy With The Extra Burden

At first they were in denial about the burden they knew we would have on them after my Dad abruptly left to Italy after the divorce. They even turned on my big sister. I remember we all went to their house in Comanche while they tried to figure things out and started to become unfriendly like we all were being rejected. My sisters and I all walked to the pond near their house in Comanche talking bad about my grandparents but later in the evening my Grandparents sat us all down around the

kitchen table to air things out. It was my Grandfather's way of doing things by having a family meeting. It was decided my big sister would finish high school and then pursue her college ambitions, and we would stay in Garland and continue to finish our school. We stayed at the house my Dad rented in Garland, my Mom tried working and my Grandparents would help out on the rent. Sometimes my autistic sister Christa would say, "dada..dada" noticing our father was no longer around and wondering what happened to him. My little sister's would hear her and say Daddy no longer here, he's gone back to Italy. Then one day that didn't seem long after my Dad left my Mom was arrested by Garland Police. Apparently she had an unpaid ticket and if things didn't seem bad enough with us to our grandparents they had to put up the money to bail her out of jail.

I Started Going To Garland High School

My first year of high school I struggled with my grades and was even singled out by an Algebra teacher named Mr. Brown who looked a bit like Gordon Ramsay and always made the joke "your Momma wears combat boots" enjoying banter with outgoing students, telling one class clown that wanted to be a rock star that the odds of him becoming famous as a rock star are

extremely low, he should concentrate more on his math, then he looked at me and said I wasn't trying hard enough to learn, my big sister took his class and did well in school so it wasn't because I was having problems at home or poor, I said nothing being called out in class but knew he was wrong. My big sister was good at masking her poverty, partly relying on friends and being able to work after school. I remember my big sister was so tired from going to high school and working that one day the door opened and she came inside looking exhausted, started crying, and fell face down on her bed. She must have been awake for 24 hours and getting very little sleep each day. Like me she had acne but would cover it up with makeup. She wore black and had a new wave style Bob Haircut. While in Sachse before having a job or car my sister had to get real creative with limited clothing, always wearing black, looking like a new waver or goth because we were so poverty stricken but now in Garland she was working and she could afford to dress better. Once my big sister came home and saw my Autistic sister touching her private area and said don't let her touch her private area all the time it can become addictive. Before my sister graduated from high school the school showed her art at one of the exhibit rooms and she became friends with some anti-establishment punk rockers known as Joni, Jeremy and Brandon, who

tried throwing a punk rock performance at the high school talent show that took place in the school auditorium but the lead singer lost his cool and ran off stage, the warm up act was a high school teacher who had his own band covering classic Eagle rock songs. Once I went with my big sister to Jeremy and Joni's house, it was a medium class neighborhood near a Safeway Supermarket. Their parents were normal and worked as computer programers. While walking home from Garland High School few of the students that I recognized from my classes tried to befriend me and would walk home with me since they were going the same direction. One was a Howard Stern look-alike who was a fan of the band Queen. He was real geeky and funny and hung around with the nerd crowd. Another kid was a medium class kid who fit in and was not considered popular or unpopular, the front of his hair had a comb over wave or flip to it like Pee Wee Herman, he would only be friendly when we were walking home. He had a strange sense of humor like he was putting me on in a joking way. One day we got to his house, and he asked me if I woke up and saw bug eyed creatures standing around my bed staring at me, does that happen to you? he asked. I said no, and he explained how it happened to him and his parents didn't believe him. I left thinking how the most normal of people can actually be strange or have strange

happenings in their life. The thought never occurred to me that he could have been abducted by aliens. Then I started walking to and from school all by myself and one day as I was leaving the school walking past the school parking lot, there were football jocks leaving in a bus, a bunch of them yelled out the bus window, "make some friends!" and I sadly walked home feeling like an outcast. My little sister Alice befriended the neighbors across the street who had kids her age and would spend a lot of time at their house playing Super Mario Brothers on the Nintendo. I went there with her once and the parents loved classic rock and would play Pink Floyd - *The Wall* on their home stereo and had it on laserdisc. One day my little sister Alice caught the kitchen on fire while trying to cook something and our cat that my big sister adopted in the mid 1980s barely escaped with its life burning its paws. Luckily the fire department was there in a short amount of time and quickly put out the fire. Posters and music T-Shirt memorabilia that I had in a closet all had smoke damage and were ruined. There was also an incident where I woke up in the morning and knew something was wrong, I felt light headed and woozy, there was a gas leak, I felt dizzy and could hardly walk so I started crawling toward the front door to escape the house, and yelled to everyone there was a gas leak, my sister Alice stood up alarmed and tried to

walk but fell on her face and started crying in fear. The fire department showed up and our neighbor helped turn off the gas.

Delivering Telephone Books For Money

Around that time, we moved to another house not too far away, it was an older wooden house. My Mom would go to an evangelical mega church named Church on the Rock in Rowlett, Texas that was east of Garland and also a smaller church closer to us in Garland. We would go along with her and stop for fountain drinks. I remember a youth club part of the Church in Garland threw an impromptu concert where one funny guy into Christian metal, lip synced to the band Stryper holding a fake electric guitar and I sat there with my sisters trying not to laugh. My Mom always wanted to be independent but was not the same person after she had a brain operation in the early 1970s even though she deemed it a miracle. She struggled with employment working menial labor or fast food and was hoping to meet another man after divorcing my Dad at her Evangelical church but sadly she never did. One day my Mom came up to me and said a man at her church was looking for teenage boys to help deliver telephone books around the neighborhood and he would pay me. I thought about the music I could buy with the money and agreed to go meet him. My mom

dropped me off at a filling station where the man was waiting in his pickup truck, he was a blue collar rugged looking man and said he had time off working at an off-shore oil rig and that he didn't believe in sitting around but was a workaholic. It was summer and very hot outside. Texas gets very humid and hot during the summer time. He picked me up and another girl who also went to the church and he drove to a warehouse area to pick up the telephone books and we helped him load them onto the back of the pickup truck. He wasn't kidding when he said he was a workaholic, there was no rest going from one house to the next to the point I was drenched with sweat and not exactly in shape for such a daunting task. As the day passed he still wanted to keep going but could see we had enough. He picked us up the next day and we started to deliver stacks of telephone books all over again, only enjoying the cooler morning until it started to get hot again. I got in a bad mood and started to clam up, so did the girl. I had doubts whether it was worth the money, the previous day I wanted to quit but didn't have the nerve to say no for another run when the day had ended. He took us back to his house which was a medium class brick home in Garland and was disappointed we did not have the same work ethic. He told us working at an off-shore oil rig was hard work and he was there when tragedy struck - the oil rig shot up equipment

shattering the bones in his face, I could see his face was somewhat flat like he had a broken nose, after recovering he went back to work because work is the only thing he knew, then he told the story of when a burglar tried to break into the house through the living room window and his dog took a piece of his leg leaving a trail of blood as the burglar ran off, he said I reminded him of his son who was lazy, he couldn't understand why we weren't thrilled to do grueling work delivering telephone books non-stop. The girl and I went into the garage to put clear plastic bags over telephone books and she looked annoyed like she wanted to quit. The song *Vogue* by Madonna was playing on the radio. It bothered me that it was similar to the dance music I liked but was very commercial geared toward the Pop charts. I tried to explain my taste in music to the girl but she didn't care; she only liked Christian music like Amy Grant and wanted to leave. We went to where we picked up telephone books to get paid. The oil rig worker made banter with the telephone book office. One of the office employees looked at me and joked I wonder what Steve is going to spend his money on? The oil rig worker stared at me and said there is no telling. I got the impression it wasn't a compliment. He invited me to go to my Mom's evangelical church, Church on the Rock, with him and his wife the following Sunday and I said okay

even though I didn't want to but decided to go because he gave me a job opportunity. The day came and I think I drove in their car and my Mom came along, he made a comment to his wife that she had too much makeup on and then the conversation turned to the church, the charismatic preacher who founded the church claiming it was a calling from God to build a mega church there had abruptly left, there was an interim preacher who looked like a businessman wearing a suit trying his best to fill his shoes and retain followers but there were fewer people in attendance judging by the empty seats. After we got back from church or the next day I got my Mom to drive me to the record store that had the dance vinyl and music I liked, I left with records an employee who was also a DJ pushed on me, and the balding man smoking cigarettes behind the counter knew how to take every last dollar but no matter, I was excited to go home and listen to what I bought. I listened to the records and there was the sensation of happiness and disappointment all at once. It wasn't necessarily the records I would have chosen if I wasn't too shy to preview the records myself. There was another problem: Buying dance vinyl was expensive and I didn't have a job. Still, I thought I found my music calling and was happy to have music that wasn't played on the Pop music radio station. It was like I was part of a subculture or

counterculture and found my calling.

Reunion With Shane at Wylie Homecoming Game

My big sister Esther was nearing graduation at Garland High and so was her friend Christie from Wylie who invited her to the senior prom football game. My big sister took me with her to the football game. A high schooler at the game came up to me and recognized me, it was Shane, I tried recognizing who was greeting me and sure enough it was him, he looked taller and older than I remembered, he said he was one of the most popular kids in school, the big athletic guy who said I would be alright if I removed the moles on my face was now unpopular, Shane looked at me and could tell I was struggling or not doing well in school based on my appearance, he started to tear up and begged me not to be a loser, and repeated it one more time before walking away, that's the last I saw of Shane. At first I got emotional too cursing myself on why I didn't try harder in school and then I thought Shane was still like the boy I played with where being popular in school was all that mattered. He lacked depth and I found my creative outlet in music like my big sister had evolved with her art. The day came to attend my big sister's high school graduation. It was a perfect sunny day and it took place in a

special building made for such gatherings. We were all dressed up for the occasion, my grandparents helped me find suitable clothes, also for my little sisters, after sitting and watching the seniors in the their graduation gowns walk in a line to the podium to receive their diploma the ceremony commenced and we gathered outside, I noticed a girl from my school also in attendance stare at me dressed up, I looked different than I normally did and she could see my family. For that day everyone was happy, my big sister was now taking community college classes at Richland College in Richardson, Texas near Garland. To cut down on cost to a four year college she wanted to take care of prerequisites and was looking at all scholarship and grant options, even applying for the United Negro College Fund. After hearing about this I laughed and told her she couldn't because she wasn't black. My sister rubbed her eyebrow thinking maybe it wasn't so far fetched. She started looking into the family tree, into her Native American side, unbeknown to me my Grandfather was half Native American, he would sometimes joke while sitting on his recliner smoking a pipe pretending to be an Indian Chief, but I never knew his mother was a squaw. My grandparents would occasionally visit an Indian reservation in Oklahoma or a Native American exhibit at a museum in Fort Worth

and were taken aback by some of the violence and suffering Native Americans went through.

Going To Anime Conventions With My Big Sister

One day my big sister took me and my little sister along to an Anime convention at a hotel. Her plan was to go to college and major in animation. The anime convention we attended was before Anime or comic conventions like Comic-con became popular in the United States. Like going to a rave it was still a type of subculture whereas instead of young people taking drugs the Anime convention appealed to a small audience of geeks and nerds similar to Star Trek conventions. A geeky man with dark curly hair liked my big sister and allowed us to get in for free. There were several rooms for gatherings in the lobby of the hotel where projectors or a VCR was set up showing imported Japanese cartoons. The lights were off in the rooms with a few geeks and nerds sitting around and some who've been attending these conventions for years dressed in costumes like Captain Harlock or what is called cosplay. I sat with my sister in one of the rooms thinking it would be a joy to see some of these science fiction Anime programs that did not air on US television like my childhood days in Italy but I found

myself becoming bored trying to follow the subtitles or listen to the bad voice overs and was awkwardly distracted by other geeks in the room, some who smelled or had B.O. I thought to myself I would have enjoyed the Anime better if I watched it at home. I looked around and was more entertained by watching the geeks and nerds but also knew they found their nerd place and had like-minded friends like the geeks and nerd crowd at school. My little sister Teresa had a soda fountain drink and as we were leaving one of the rooms in her awkwardness she spilled it all over the floor with some geeks laughing or making comments. I walked around the hotel to another room and a mid aged man was showing Star Trek slides, there were only a few people seated and then I heard a loud commotion. A long haired man in a Texas accent with other people who were nerds was yelling, "Praise Bob! Praise Bob!" Like a religious satire where they formed their own mock religion. We wondered where my big sister was and waited by her Ford Escort. She told my little sister she would meet us there. It was now night and she eventually came out holding hands with the curly haired geek who ran the event. I couldn't tell if anything went on between them or they just talked and she was buttering up to get VIP access because of her animation ambitions. Some months passed and there was another Anime convention. My

big sister thought she could get in for free. This one though was smaller and was mostly booths of memorabilia with one small movie room, the promoter of the event was in one of those moods complaining about pirated Anime someone was trying to sell that was not from a legit distributor. He saw us seated in a viewing room and asked for tickets but my big sister could not talk her way out of it and we were escorted out. My big sister, where things usually went her way, experienced some humility for once. She wasn't too happy and said the promoter of the event implied she could go for free. I'm not sure if this was because of her friendly relationship with the organizer of the previous event but we got in her car and left.

My Big Sister Goes Away To Art School

One day my big sister was excited, she was accepted into an elite art school. She applied to one of the top art schools in America - The Rhode Island School of Design but was accepted to another school in Pasadena, California. The only obstacle was tuition and money, the first year would be critical in applying for scholarships at the school. Since my big sister did well in high school my grandparents decided they were going to help her. My Grandmother in particular believed in higher education, having obtained a masters degree in English at TCU and

becoming an English teacher.

I Went to Dallas First Official Rave

While my big sister was still in Texas she drove me and one of her Garland High School friends named Bahner to a rave, Bahner brought his friend Phil along who was an extroverted blond. After being dropped off near downtown Dallas I walked around Deep Ellum with Bahner and Phil, Deep Ellum was an area near downtown Dallas with lots of bars and clubs, they were both dressed wearing Dr. Martens, wallet chains, and t-shirts from the Industrial Music era like the cool alternative kids when I was in Middle School. We pulled down a poster hanging up in Deep Ellum that was advertising the rave as a souvenir, near where all the traffic passed, this was considered Dallas's first rave, even though there were some acid house or rave themed events that took place at the clubs, the rave was very organized and was at an outdoor venue with sand on the ground for volleyball, the venue was called the Dallas Beach Club, a line formed outside and we were let in getting stares by older clubbers who were also in attendance, some of them were from the New Romantic era or new wavers and were dressed in black wearing lip stick and eye liner, I saw the local radio disc jokey who I sent prank tapes to, there were a few people with baggy skater

pants shuffling their feet around on cardboard due to the sand being on the ground, there was large speaker cabinets blaring house music and techno, there was also a large beer truck ready to cater to the adults in attendance, some there were smoking pot, the event was a bit of a dud, not as many people showed up as hoped for, it may have had to do with the outdoor setting, or the concept of rave being very new to America at the time, rave was like a type of Woodstock with DJ's playing non-stop music, it started in England with acid house during the late 1980s, a type of counter-culture movement for X-gens, we got there during the day and there wasn't a lot of dancing, we stood by a fence taking it all in just staring, then we all gathered to the front of a stage when a live artist would play music on a keyboard with a light show and smoke machine. Bahner, Phil and I watching the live performance all yelled drugs suck! and laughed. One of the live songs was about substance abuse and had the sample "overdose." The live performance was over and another DJ got on, Bahner and Phil started to get hungry, they knew of a place in Deep Ellum that served free hamburgers and you could tip or donate afterward, we left the rave at the Beach Club, and started walking down Deep Ellem with the Downtown Dallas skyline as a backdrop, Bahner and Phil started singing a NWA song as we walked,

we got there ordered burgers and abruptly left without tipping due to not having any money, the man there washing beer glasses gave us the evil stare as we left, we returned to the rave and unlike England where it would last to the morning hours it was coming to an end during the early AM. People started to exit and wait near the street, I didn't have the nerve to spark up a conversation to the radio disc jockey who was conversing with others but would occasionally glance our direction hearing my loud voice like he recognized it from my prank calls, we were also really young not old enough to drive and kept on getting stares, some with probably perverted intentions. Before going to an actual rave, I only knew of the music not the clubbing subculture which was a different can of worms that appealed to people into substance abuse and debauchery. For me this aspect of the music was a bit of a disappointment but it was still an exciting time. I could tell some of these club goers had issues and that's why they turned to that lifestyle. My sister finally pulled up in her Ford Escort and drove us back home. While good things were happening for my sister, the opposite was occurring for me in high school. Virtually all my grades were an F, even my old friend Shane pleading with me not to be a loser didn't turn things around.

Summer School at North Garland High

School

I was held back my Freshman year unless I went to summer school, it took place at North Garland high school and was in one class room. I remember hearing *Ain't No Future in Yo' Frontin'* by Mc Breed outside the school on a booming car audio system. There was a convenience store across from the school that had Street Fighter, the coin operated video console game that some students would play on their lunch break. The concept of dance music being played at a rave by a DJ was also catching on with other students. I overheard a kid in my class named Mundo talking about raves and the type of music that wasn't being played on commercial radio. I recognized him from when I went to Sam Houston Middle School. He was one of the kids dressed Industrial with the wallet chains and Dr. Martens. I was too bashful to tell Mundo that I had been into rave music and I remembered him from Middle School. In Summer school the teacher took us to the school library and while browsing the books I came across a book on paranormal subject matters like the Loch Ness Monster, UFOs, and spontaneous human combustion. I found the unexplained subject matter fascinating thinking could the UFO photos in the book be real or the photo or the Loch Ness Monster sticking its head out of the water? Maybe my fascination

stemmed from such subject matters going against conventional belief or a type of escape from my own reality.

Back to Garland High School

The following school year at Garland High School times were changing, no longer was it 80s hair metal, I remember one kid in particular in my class that appeared to be a normal popular student change into the Seattle grunge rock look and was into Kurt Cobain and Nirvana. A student girl told him it was hippy music but it wasn't, it was the 1990s and times were changing. The radio station playing 80s hair metal called Z Rock had switched formats to alternative rock, which was similar to what was known as college radio or college rock in the 80s. The kids wearing Guns N' Roses and Metallica T-Shirts from a few years earlier all but disappeared. Although there was still that one scary student who wore the Misfits T-Shirt and combat boots. My Big Sister who was into New Wave or new romantic music during the late 80s was now hanging out with her high school punk friends who would write the Washington D.C. band Fugazi fan mail and the band would occasionally write them back, her punk friends were also fans of the Beastie Boys who now appealed to an alternative rock fan base. In the class where the normal kid turned into a fan of grunge, a

Latino kid got up to hand the teacher a homework paper and had a stiff erection for all the class to see, instead of becoming embarrassed he showed off his erection to some of the girls sitting up front, one commented it was fake and he responded no, it's real. He liked RnB and rap music and wrote the word Jodeci on the side chalk board. The normal preppy kid who turned grunge stared at me sitting a few desk across like he wanted to be my friend because Kurt Cobain was a loner. Like I observed in summer school there were now more teens at Garland High discovering rave music and alternative rock or grunge. One who liked rave was a blond kid who was still very immature and a class clown, he sat beside me. He wanted me to listen to the Utah Saints, a British rave duo that had some success sampling a Kate Bush song and I told him I knew about the group and liked rave music too. Sampling technology was considered very expensive in the 1980s, where a snippet of audio is stored digitally and played back on a keyboard and was now more accessible to home studio recording artist who did not need to go in a big studio, like me experimenting with the Casio toy keyboard that could sample, the home studio or DIY mentality was a big part of rave music. A lot of dance tracks had catchy samples and hooks. Old songs could be given a new twist or used as a catchy hook that

made DJ's buy the record. The blond kid told me about a small illegal rave club located on Industrial Avenue closer to Downtown Dallas. The teacher who was a thin Italian American man with an oval face and balding head and looked similar to the actor Patrick Stewart saw us talking and singled the class clown blond kid out. He said he had potential but had to assert himself. Then the teacher told the story of being a businessman in a skyscraper and impressing clients by charging at an unbreakable glass window and bouncing off giving them scare.

Turning 16 and Getting my Driver's License

Around that time I was 16 and learned how to drive, my big sister helped pay for drivers ed class, the drivers ed teacher was a mid aged woman. It was time for the driving test. I awkwardly drove a driving school car around with sometimes the teacher intervening, having to press on the breaks, and by the end of the test I think she thought I was teasing or flirting with her and said okay enough you passed, staring in the mirror fixing her hair and walking out. My grandfather helped me with a used 1970s car, similar to the type my Dad would buy. When Friday came around I drove to Industrial Boulevard, a lonely stretch of highway with warehouses and old buildings and found the raver club the blond kid in

class told me about. It was not an official club, the DJ's spinning records had tapped into the electricity and there was only a smoke machine, loud speakers in the corners, and minimal lighting like strobes. I made my Mom, who was into sewing, make colorful baggy shorts and I wore an oversized fluorescent t-shirt with it. I also had a necklace made out of a bright long shoestring with a whistle attached. When I got there I danced like mad all around the club like a Mexican jumping bean, stomping my feet, and trying all sorts of dance moves. People asked what type of drugs I was taking but having a conversation was hard because the music was so loud, someone trying to talk to you consisted of a person screaming in your ear. Unlike the other patrons I was not into drugs but taking ecstasy or smoking a joint was a big part of the music, and I guess the whole point of playing trippy, repetitious music. The DJ's got a strong reaction when they dropped a hip-hop song from Cypress Hill or Kris Kross entitled *Jump* to break up the monotony of fast paced beats. I noticed a lot had changed in the six months since I attended Dallas' first rave. The new wavers I saw were all but gone, it was mostly high schoolers, teens from the suburbs wearing stereotypical raver clothing. The blond kid acknowledged I was there and went to be amongst other friends and kind of smiled at my uncharacteristic behavior. As I was

leaving I thought I have to see him again tomorrow at school where I've always been shy. There were some female clubbers in the parking lot more interested in booze, I thought maybe I could get laid, they kind of stared at me and I said hey girls, they responded sarcastically exclaiming hey little boy and laughing, my childhood was coming to an end, I was now dealing with young women no longer girls and I was becoming a young man. When the weekend was over it was back to school where I was shy. I drove there in my used beat up car from the ghetto apartment we were now living in and noticed other students driving to school. One car had a Sonic Youth bumper sticker and another car had a Jane's Addiction sticker. At school I saw the blond class clown kid, I was almost embarrassed to show up to class because of my out of character wild dancing. He said after I left some skin heads showed up and were trying to start a fight because the illegal club was their former spot. There was another class I was in and the teacher commented about the Dallas Cowboys under coach Jimmy Johnson, how they may win the Super Bowl. I remember being at a laundromat with my Mom and sisters while a playoff game was on TV and watching Alvin Harper catch a long pass by quarterback Troy Aikman in a thriller against the 49ers. Then during the Super Bowl walking around the empty streets of Garland hearing

everyone screaming and cheering inside their houses while watching the game. I skipped high school to go to the Super Bowl parade in Downtown Dallas and saw a mob scene of mostly young hoodlums who also skipped school to go to the parade. I remember turning on the radio on Sunday Night and hearing a live broadcast from a club that was an 1980s retro throwback and hearing Yazzo! *Situation*; Depeche Mode - *Just Can't Get Enough* and thinking this is sort of like techno, it was still new to me, I missed out on early 80s music in America because I lived in Italy during that time. During that time I got a job at McDonalds in Garland. I was happy and excited but would learn an adult lesson - no job is guaranteed to last, especially minimum wage or fast food. The manager didn't like my social awkwardness and nervous behavior behind the cash register and had me mopping the floor. Like my Dad, my job did not last long. Later I got a job at Dairy Queen. Dairy Queen was a Texas fast food chain that made hamburgers and served ice cream. I saw the now hiring sign and walked in and asked about the job. The manager was there sitting at a table with his female partner, he said I'm hired as the cook and to start work tomorrow. I remember I just started driving and throwing a tantrum with my mom in the car because she either didn't have the money or couldn't find the right shirt I needed for the job after the

manager told me how to dress and I sped up real fast in my car with my Mom screaming to slow down since it was the day I was supposed to start work and kept speeding until I lost control of the car at an intersection turning too fast and almost wrecked into a stoplight pole screeching to a halt. I was lucky there was no oncoming traffic and learned a valuable lesson even more important than my job at Dairy Queen - I had to control my young emotions when driving or it could be fatal. The job at Dairy Queen did not work out that well. I had a hard time keeping up with orders during rush hour since I was the only one preparing food. I was a nervous wreck getting hamburger grease all over me. The stress and the grease made my face break out more. Then I had to clean up all the greasy equipment and mop the floor after being sweaty with a flushed red face and feeling exhausted. The second day I started to give up after being worked like a mule and the orders started to pile up and the manager let me go. After I was fired driving home I became upset and even cried. My first two jobs at fast food didn't work out like flunking out of high school.

Dropping Out Of High School

As my grandparents favored my sister who excelled in life, they were becoming more passive aggressive toward us, the void of my

struggling father had to be filled and my grandfather saw me as an extension of my Dad. They came to meet us at White Rock Lake driving all the way to Dallas in their 1984 Oldsmobile. I was wearing neon colored raver clothing my Mom had made, and it did not get a very good reaction from my grandfather judging by his facial expression. He immediately thought of my Dad who he viewed as crazy. My little sister Teresa who like me was introverted started going through a hard puberty and became anorexic during her teen years slashing her arms leaving visible scars. One day the principal called me into the principal's office, he looked at my grades and told me it was time to make it or break it. It was like he was telling me it's okay to drop out. There was a blonde with long straight hair who gave me glances at the start of school when my grandparents helped out with clothes but I was down to the same sneakers and a change of shirts with baggy ugly pants, now she did not even look in my direction. I got the impression she was more into alternative rock or had indie rock taste. Once I saw her cursing out some Roper guys in the hallway who were giving her a hard time or made some comments toward her. Ropers were guys who dressed country in blue jeans, cowboy boots like the type of guys you would see at rodeo competitions and belonged to the 4-H club. The 4-H club prepares students

for jobs in agriculture or ranching. Ropers were similar to football jocks and were considered preppy, not part of the alternative or punk crowd that my big sister would hang around who were only a small group in high school. The class clown kid who told me about the raver club I would only now see in the hallway since we were now in different classes and he was more distant. I gave him a tape I had on me of records I bought from a year prior as a friendly gesture and he thanked me and walked off without much to say. My school locker was empty, I virtually had no books and would just pretend to open it and stare inside and then go along with other students to class. We had to take a foreign language class, I had a German teacher who wore suspenders and described how German TV is more high definition with better commercials, he showed TV commercials from the mid 1980s of people wearing parachute pants and jumping around on pogo balls, the class was not impressed since the old footage was out of fashion. All the nerds sat at the front of the class and were quiet carefully paying attention, the back of the class with the non-motivated students is where I was seated and it got loud with goofing off, a guy seated behind me wore a leather jacket and smelled of cigarettes, he looked like he was too old to go to high school and like me must have been held back, he drove a motorcycle to school

and flirted with the girl seated next to him. A nerd asked the German teacher if Hitler was a bad person when the topic of the war came up, the teacher said he was only bad because he lost the war. I thought to myself is the German teacher a Hitler apologists? I chuckled that nobody seemed to care or was paying attention to what he just said - he could have said anything. The German teacher did not fit in with other faculty at the school and would often be seen walking to class alone looking sad. Garland High School was not the most dangerous school in the Dallas area like the high schools in South Dallas that were predominantly black but fights were not uncommon. I remember there was a fight in the hallway and some blood on the floor. One of the students in the fight got a bloody face or nose. I also remember the occasional drive-by shooting or shots fired in the school parking lot. Fights in school usually resulted in suspension and something serious like a shooting would have resulted in expulsion. There was another class I was in where a juvenile delinquent had mohawk and face piercings. He sat at a table next to me and during a class project where we were seated in groups he said he was a white supremacist and asked other students why weren't they racist? The other students who were impressionable would respond that they didn't know why, with one student cursing him out as stupid. After school he got in a

fight with some black kids and was expelled. The high school I went to, Garland High, had a large minority representation, I recognized one of the black kids who chased me home from school and took my bicycle when I was younger, he was excelling and also working a part time job, his buddy that was with him took an opposite turn and was in trouble with the law, the black students mostly hung around each other, *You Don't Hear me Doe* by rapper Scarface was a popular rap song with them. In Drafting class where students used drafting tables to learn drafting, the black teens in class were singing *Roxanne* "...don't have to put on the red light," by the rock group The Police thinking it was a funny song. There was a poor white teen who tried to hang around the black students and dress like them but was treated like an outcast, some called him a wigger - a name for white people who tried to act black. Sitting in the gym, a chain smoking female with tattoos who looked older than the other students sat across from me smiling and asked so when are you going to drop out? Instead of getting mad I paused and said I don't know. Our Mom moved us to a ghetto apartment, the scary type I feared while taking the bus in Middle School. It was further away and harder to get to school on time. Shortly afterward I was sent to detention class for being late again and when I got out my binder with all my school papers fell on the

street and was run over by busy traffic. I looked at the school papers blowing down the street and decided not to chase and pick them up. That's when I dropped out of high school. I was saddened but felt relief at the same time. My childhood was over and a new chapter of young adulthood began. I got in my used beat up car and turned the radio on, Information Society's Peace & Love, Inc. was playing on the radio, I drove off and went home.

What Was Left Out Of This Book?

I have a memory of going to Six Flags with my sisters when hair metal was popular and two metal dudes in front of us on a roller coaster ride screaming with their arms raised when the roller coaster was slow and silent when it went fast, going to a water theme park called Wet n' Wild and going down the water slides, going to a swimming pool near Lake Proctor and my swimming trunks slipping down where my bottom was showing when getting out of the pool and the female lifeguard smiling and staring at me, our grandparents taking us to a drive thru safari called Arbuckle Wilderness while we stared at the animals from inside their car, going to one of my Mom's church member's house for an outdoor cook out and eating burgers with thick patties and seeing their hyperactive kid run fast everywhere, seeing the movie *Song*

of the South by Disney at a packed dollar movie theater as a small child and cringing when the kid in the movie gets charged by a bull, going to the movies to see Popeye - one of my Dad's favorite movies, going to see 'Total Recall' with my dad and the scene with the three breasted woman, also my Dad taking me to a dollar theater to see Back To the Future III, going to Wyatt's Cafeteria where you chose American dishes from a food line and remembering the mashed potatoes with brown gravy, cheddar Mac n cheese, fried okra, sirloin steak with A1 sauce or Worcestershire sauce, watching *Transformers the Motion Picture* and loving the Japanese style animation but hating the rock music that sounded like the band Survivor "Eye of the Tiger." I lost interest in Transformers after the movie. I remember my sister driving to my Grandparents in her Ford Escort without my parents and she turned up Orchestral Maneuvers In The Dark real loud in her car while it was parked at a gas station trying to show off - OMD was her favorite group. I mentioned some movies in this book that my Dad would take me to see as a child like Condorman, The Black Hole, Invaders from Mars, 2010: The Year We Make Contact along with the usual iconic movies like the Star Wars trilogy and the Star Trek movies including Star Trek: The Motion Picture. I remember some non-sci-fi movies from the 80s like Mask; Firestarter (1984)

that my sisters talked about. There were many TV shows from my childhood that aired on terrestrial television from the 80s that bring back memories and old TV show reruns like Get Smart; I Dream of Jeannie; Bewitched; Hogan's Heroes; Punky Brewster; The Greatest American Hero; Married... with Children; Mama's Family; Chips; Small Wonder; Alf; The A-Team with Mr. T; Three's Company; The Banana Splits; B. J. and the Bear; Hanna-Barbera cartoons like Woody Woodpecker, Tom and Jerry, The Flintstones; Warner Brothers cartoons like Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck, Wile E. Coyote and the Road Runner, Scooby-Doo!; The Smurfs; Inspector Gadget; Ewoks cartoon; Winnie-the-Pooh; Pee-wee's Playhouse; Sesame Street; Mr. Peppermint; Mr. Rogers Neighborhood; Battlestar Galactica; Buck Rogers in the 25th Century; Land of the Lost; The Six Million Dollar Man; Fantasy Island; The Love Boat; Airwolf; Knight Rider; Rockford Files (theme); Columbo; Kojak; Welcome Back Carter; All in the Family; Cheers; Hogan's Heroes; The Three Stooges; Gilligan's Island; Unsolved Mysteries; Moonlighting; The Little Rascals; Gomer Pyle, U.S.M.C; Knight Rider; Little House on the Prairie; Kevin Von Erich wrestling; American Gladiators; In Living Color - the Black and Latinos would talk about the latest episode in High School, also Arsenio Hall; Mr Belvedere; Family Ties; The Addams Family; The Dukes of Hazzard;

Three's Company; The Munsters; Charles in Charge; Growing Pains, Family Matters, Full House or what was called TGIF on the ABC network; Life Goes On; Doogie Howser, M.D.; Night Court; Diff'rent Strokes; 21 Jump Street; Bosom Buddies; Good Times; The Cosby Show; Schoolhouse Rock; America's Funniest Home Videos; Candid Camera; educational shows that aired on PBS. like Reading Rainbow; Read All About It!, Zardip's Search for Healthy Wellness to Christian Network shows for kids like Circle Square; Joy Junction; Superbook to old movies shown on TV like Benji, the many science fiction, Western, Kung Fu movies, Charles Bronson, Chuck Norris, The Karate Kid. Also television commercials and food from my childhood like New Coke, Wendy's - 'Where's the Beef ' Ad; The McDonalds "Mack the Knife" commercial, Chips ahoy Commercial; Zero candy bar and Jolt Cola when I lived in Wylie; Honey Smacks - a favorite cold cereal of my Dad. I guess that's all I can remember for the moment. I'm sure when this book is printed other memories of my childhood will come to mind but I guess that's how the past goes, it's hard to include everything from every passing day. It's those memories that stick out or make a lasting impression.

What happened to Stephen and the people mentioned in this book?

Stephen: In my 20s I suffered from panic attacks when going to a record store or working at a job, I also had bad skin. I worked temp jobs, at a factory for awhile, then security guard overnights. I got a GED with the help of my grandmother a few years after dropping out, there were various attempts going to community college taking a class here and there. In the late 1990s and 2000s I became known as an internet troll and delved into UFOs from listening to the Art Bell radio program and then becoming a targeted individual receiving electronic harassment. It's detailed in my book *Covert Microwave Harassment Not Just 5G (2020) & Directed Energy Attacks in Los Angeles - A Memoir Of Electronic Harassment by the Authorities (2023)*. In my 40s I was curious about higher education and obtained an Associates of Arts Degree attending college in New York. I still have a love for music but it never had the same magic of when I first got into it in my youth.

Stephen's Father: My father Gene Watson never returned to America and retired as a welder in Italy. He found a woman to live with who is now elderly where they share a stucco building along with her mid aged alcoholic son. He didn't try to build another flying saucer but retained a love for junk going to a junkyard and built ion lifters. He

expressed some of his flying saucer and propulsion concepts to his son who released self-published books. He sometimes stays in contact with me via Email. Esther, his eldest daughter, would visit him during the 1990s and have a reunion with her childhood Italian friends.

My father's foster parents: Peggy died of lung cancer during the mid 1990s. Bill Watson passed away during the late 1990s. They both enjoyed bowling and lived out their years at Lake Texoma. They left my father nothing because of a falling out when he bailed to Italy and never spoke to Peggy again.

Stephen's Mother: My Mom eventually moved closer to my big sister in Southern California and lives in an assisted living retirement home. She struggled keeping employment and never remarried after my Dad left. She described electronic harassment like her son and I believe she became a targeted family member. My big sister however cites more mundane explanations.

Our Cat Puter (re-named Sachse): The blue cream tortoiseshell cat my big sister adopted in 1985 from the Humane Society lived a long time, lived through many houses and apartments eventually passing away in the

early 2000s living with my Mom.

My Dad's Italian relatives: Rosa still lives in Italy close to my Dad, her husband had a nerve disorder becoming bed-ridden and eventually dying. Her son's Dino and Fabio had kids and live a normal Italian life. One works at an airport and the other sells jewelry to tourists in Milan.

My siblings: My big sister in the 1990s did well in freelance illustration, meeting her future husband at art school who was also an illustrator, they both went on to teach as Art Professors in Southern California. She had one child who also went to art school and is now an adult. My other siblings or sister's struggled with employment and mental health. One had a child and divorced. The other is an artist and has a small following on the internet and lives at Joshua Tree. My autistic sister lives in a group-care home.

My Sister's high School friends: Her gay friend Ron continued using drugs in the 90s and worked doing window dressing in clothing stores. Her friend Christie married a guido and became a pharmacist. Christie's little brother Chad who was popular in school suffered from mental health issues and became withdrawn not leaving the house. My big sister's non-conformist punk friends from Garland High School eventually sold out and

had normal families with kids like their parents who were computer programmers making a decent living working in the tech and moving to Arizona.

Stephen's Grandparents: My grandmother in her elderly years fell and broke her hip in 2008 and shortly passed away thereafter in an old folks home. My grandfather Bill Day sold his ranch style home in Comanche after my grandmother broke her hip and stayed in the old folks home until he passed away of old age in 2011. My Grandfather's siblings who were older than him passed away during the late 1990s and early 2000s. Red, the relative from Houston, was laid off from NASA in the 90s and lived on disability with his wife.

My Childhood Neighborhood Friends: I lost contact with my neighborhood friends Luigi, Dusty, Shane after moving. I wasn't as good as keeping contact with my childhood friends as my big sister. A common theme in this book is our friendships worked when we lived close by but lost contact after moving to a new neighborhood.

More Books By Stephe Watson:

Covert Harassment Not Just 5G & Directed

Energy Attacks in Los Angeles - A Memoir Of Electronic Harassment by the Authorities to raise awareness about covert harassment and directed energy attacks and his Dad's ideas are in the books: Gene Watson - Flying Saucers; Gene Watson Best Of: Propulsion Concepts; Gene Watson - Bevatron.